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Mrs. W. G. Goudie.
Xmas. '27

ME—AND PETER

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BY
ROBERT WATSON

AUTHOR OF
"MY BRAVE AND GALLANT GENTLEMAN"
"GORDON OF THE LOST LAGOON"
"STRONGER THAN HIS SEA"
ETC., ETC.

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To

A HAPPY LITTLE FELLOW NAMED HUGH
AND TO THE MEMORY OF
"PETER"

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FOREWORD

THE unnamed "Me" in this unusual memoir is one whom I knew even better than I knew Peter. After many years of separation, during which I had almost forgotten of his existence he came to me in my little cabin as I idled a few glorious summer months by the sea, in an almost unknown inlet of the Gulf of Georgia, in the Far West.

At the end of a long conversation on *the days of auld lang syne*, he rose and placed a manuscript in my hand.

"You remember Peter," he said, "and you learned to love him. But, with the days of our boyhood, Peter is gone. Read this over at your leisure, and, afterwards, do what you will with it."

I read it, and read it again. I have smiled, I have laughed, and I have wept; not so much at what I found in it, as at the recollections it brought back to me: what it made me remember of the things I had long, long given up thinking of—some pleasant, a few sad, but all mellowed by the passing years.

Maybe you, too, will remember Peter—sometimes real, sometimes the spirit of him only—who comes into all our lives and leaves us the better for having been with us.

ROBERT WATSON.

ME—AND PETER

CHAPTER ONE

I

An odour or a perfume has always had the effect of rousing in me somnolent memories.

The pungent smell of cheap soap-suds never fails to visualise in my mind a little figure standing up to the knees in a bath tub which rested on a rag mat before the kitchen fire, a busy hand grasping an all too wet sponge and, above it, a pale, tender face with dark brown, loving eyes, surmounted by an abundance of glossy, jet black hair.

There was always an aftermath to that nightly tubbing, an aftermath which I dreaded always, fearing it would surely cut me off from life before I had got properly started.

The trust and confidence which I reposed in my mother never seemed to be quite sufficient to dispel the terrors of the smothering feeling which I experienced when she drew my little, tight-fitting, woollen semet over my head and I had to work my arms through the sleeves. In that brief moment, which seemed an eternity, I used to go through all the horrors of being strangled, smothered, and buried alive. What a relief it was when the struggle was over and my head emerged safely through the aperture, conveying, as it did, the

comforting assurance that I had won a respite from death for another twenty-four hours!

II

I was the last offspring of a large family. Some of my sisters and one brother had died before I was born, leaving ten of us, besides my father and mother, in what must have been a rather overcrowded home in the heart of the great seaport city of Glasgow.

My only remaining brother, who apparently had merely been waiting for a reasonable excuse, got married shortly after I was born and so passed out of my life for many years.

With the discovery of my ability to use my limbs, came to me the awful horror of inaction, which I have never yet been able to overcome. To sit idle was a penance, and my continual cry, "What shall I do next? What shall I do next?" must have taxed my mother's patience greatly, as it surely did her ingenuity in finding employment for me suitable to my juvenile tastes.

As she busied herself about her work, she would find me a bag of old buttons to sort out on the kitchen table, showing me how to arrange them according to their respective kinds; trouser buttons, shirt buttons, coat buttons, glove buttons and many other kinds; and how to string them together for future use.

Another favourite pastime which she contrived for me was the emptying out of the sawdust vitals of her pin cushion and the picking out of the needles and pins which had trespassed therein. So often did I have those tasks to do that I strongly suspect now that my mother jumbled the button-bag and pushed a few pins and needles into the cushion's inwards every night after she

put me to bed, all in anticipation of my entertainment on the morrow.

The first real serious event in my life took place about this time. I was the unfortunate party to an accident which brought down Nemesis, in the shape of the hand of an angry father, upon a sensitive part of me, which has left in me still a grudge against all fathers in general and one in particular.

Clad only in a little short shirt, I was executing a military route march through the house, with a broom held high, business end in the air, unheeding of the repeated warnings that my belligerence would end in disaster, as belligerence always does.

My father was an ardent bird fancier, and brass-wired, glass-fronted cages were none too good for his feathered songsters. One of these cages suddenly rushed out from nowhere and came violently in contact with my broom—and down came cage, canary and all. The crash of broken glass brought my father in at a run from his workshop. He picked up the little, fluffy, yellow, dead thing from out the broken glass and twisted wires and, with his temper at boiling point, he thrashed me until I thought I should surely be as dead as the canary.

It was a dreadful experience for one so young, but through a sea of tears and a tumult of howls I spluttered back to life's shore and was able to take my next meal as heartily as if I had never been anywhere near the gates of Eternity.

I was learning fast; more ways than one.

The development of singing powers, or maybe some higher motive, prompted my elder sisters—all of whom were Sunday school teachers—to take me to church with them on Sunday afternoons, with the result that I learned to sing "Joy Bells Ringing, Children Singing" as lustily as any coal pedlar long before I could

discriminate between a "joy bell" and the agony cry of the aforementioned fuel-hawker.

III

One after another, in quick succession, my elder sisters married and settled down in homes of their own, and with one exception the others were either attending school or at business earning their own living. In this way, I was left almost entirely in the delightful company and under the loving care of my mother, happy and boisterous, without a worry in the world, until the time came when she fell desperately ill; a time of depression and misery for me, and for all of us.

They put her away in a darkened room all by herself, and big black-bearded men, with black coats and little mysterious black bags, kept calling continually, bringing with them an oppressive feeling of impending evil, with their doleful countenances, their whispered conclaves, their tip-toeing and their noiseless opening and shutting of doors; a feeling which I long found impossible to get over in the presence of doctors.

Once every day I was taken into the sickroom for a moment, to look upon a bed covered with white sheets, two thin and wasted hands lying limply on top, and a pale, pale face whose eyes alone conveyed to me that this was my mother, my dear old playmate; for the energy and merriment were gone from her and her glossy black hair was cut short like my own.

She would smile faintly to me and whisper my name, as tears flooded up in her eyes. And hard as I tried to keep them back—for well I knew what would follow—sobs would come up to my throat and my hands would reach out and clutch her bedclothes. That would conclude the interview, for I would be hurried outside

and laid down on a rug upon the floor, only to cry and sob myself to sleep in my loneliness and dejection.

When the crisis in my mother's illness drew near I was taken away because of the noises I made, and was billeted on one of my married sisters. It was my first separation from my mother, and during all that dreadful banishment, my only desire was a desire to be back where she was. And through all her suffering her one request was for me. So urgent did it become at last that they had to take me back again, noise and all, as an aid to her recovery.

But I was greatly subdued and had begun to realise the awful meaning of sickness. Still, I found the atmosphere of my surroundings a little improved. The depression seemed farther off, the clouds that had gathered over our little home were scattering and the sun was beginning to come out again. Only one man with a black coat and a black bag now came, and then only every other day. He had a smile on his face where before had been a most serious aspect. Sometimes on his way out he would pat me on the head and talk so pleasantly that I felt everything must be all right; although I was still chary of him and had my suspicions that he and his friend had, somehow, been the cause of all the trouble.

By aid of a long scarf attached to the foot of her bed, my mother was now able to pull herself up into a sitting position. When I saw her do it for the first time, I clapped my hands and shouted with delight, for I knew then that she was getting better. But my sister hastily ejected me for my thoughtless exuberance.

Then, in the early mornings, when the house would be wrapped in silence, I would creep out of my little bed and patter cautiously into my mother's room, where she would be lying awake, her large eyes looking up at the ceiling as she watched the progress of the beams of

filtered light which were thrown there as they travelled along in unison with the rising sun.

With a wonderful smile she would hold up the end of the bedclothes by way of invitation and I would creep in beside her, snuggling close up in her arms, my cheek against hers, the two of us bubbling over with happiness. The element of stealth and the danger of discovery added greatly to the pleasure of these flying moments.

How I used to slip down under the blankets when I heard footsteps coming, in the fear that I would be found out! And how my mother used to aid me in my childish endeavours to evade detection! But when it so happened that I was discovered, we always pleaded for just five minutes more together, and it was seldom that my sister had the heart to refuse us.

Soon after this, my mother grew well again, and the doctor told us that she would become stronger than ever she had been before. And so it proved. In all the many years that followed and with all her hard, single-handed combat with life, I hardly ever knew of her being confined to her bed for even a day at a time.

CHAPTER TWO

I

I WAS only some five years old when I lost my father, and my mother and her family were left in the heart of a great city without a provider.

The responsibilities resting on my mother increased a thousandfold, but with a stout heart and a smiling face she attacked her difficulties and won through.

It was found impossible to keep the home as before, so it was broken up. The three eldest of my unmarried sisters were earning their livelihoods in various businesses in the city, and it was arranged that they should lodge each with one of my married sisters while my mother, my two younger sisters and myself went out to some country district where food and rents were cheaper and where anything in the nature of clothing sufficed the daily need.

We journeyed to a little village called Dolphinton, to the home of an aunt of ours who owned a croft there. We were allotted a small room, with board, at a very small rental.

I experienced no sense of loss by the change. It was more a distinct sense of gain, for it seems now that I only began to live from that period. Up to this time, I had never seen a cow or a pig, a rabbit or a bee, not even a wild bird excepting an occasional swarm of dirty, little, vagrant city sparrows—more like mice

than birds, God bless them! I had not seen a barnyard fowl, and my wondering eyes had never beheld a wriggly worm. Little wonder then that an entirely new life opened out to me and at the same time opened me out like a bud in the warm sunshine.

Dolphinton was a sleepy little place in those days; doubtless it still is. The railway was a long way off and the dwelling houses were situated along the main road, on one side only, and some hundreds of yards apart. In front, as far as the eye could scan, were great stretches of green pasture and brown, freshly-turned soil; while in the rear was seemingly unending, thickly-wooded forest.

My aunt (for somehow, I never thought of my uncle as having anything particular to do with the place) ran a miniature farm. She had two cows, from which she supplied a number of her neighbours with milk; her backyard was alive with a clachan of fowls, and she kept a sow which furnished the winter pork for the seniors of the family.

Our own family failing was noticeable in my aunt; she had a most numerous progeny. The exact number of them I cannot recollect now, but she had one son whom I do remember. His name was John. I think he was older than I and he was considerably over my fighting weight. John was endowed with an astonishing physical strength which I was compelled to recognise, but I considered him my inferior when it came to craftiness. On one occasion his physical energy bled my nose. Next day my craft caused the throwing of a heavy missile from behind a dyke, raised a lump on his brow as big as a potato and sent him home bellowing with more noise to the minute than a fog-horn on a dirty night.

His strength and my craft were so frequently arrayed on opposite sides that, although I have not met him

from that time to this, I retain a most vivid recollection of him.

II

My mother, my two sisters and I were quartered in an eight by eight, or thereabouts, front-room, with chinks in the walls and a window that would not close when it had been opened, and would not open when it had been closed. The room was floored with flagstones as cold to the feet as iceblocks. The only part of that stone floor which was covered was that in the immediate vicinity of Scotland's most respected family convenience, the concealed bed, and at that place only by a rag rug no bigger than an ordinary doormat.

A rickety table with a leg in splints, two chairs and a wooden trunk comprised the furnishings. The space underneath the bed was retained by my aunt as a storage warehouse. There was no bureau, no mirror or toilet set in that room, but we did not seem to suffer any great inconvenience from their absence. A tin basin on a bench at the back door sufficed all the needs of the matutinal ablution, while a large tub served the entire house in rotation for the weekly altogether.

The first night that we taxed the congested area of the concealed bed, we made the discovery that we were not the only occupants of the room. In the small hours my mother roused me, I being the only man-body present. She whispered to me to keep silent. We both sat up and listened. The scuffling, scrambling, scampering and squeaking, and the rustling of paper that was going on was enough to fire a less imaginative mind than mine. My mother struck a light. As she did so, large, brown, furry animals scampered off in all

directions, across the floor; under the bed and down innumerable holes in every corner of the room.

"Rats!" exclaimed my mother, a tiny bit afraid.

Had she said "Tigers," or "Elephants," it would have conveyed just as much to me, for my idea of a rat was that it was some kind of ferocious animal. However, she managed to allay my fears, although I feel certain she did not succeed altogether in quieting her own; and it was not many nights before the rats and I were on terms of familiarity which bred indifference if not contempt.

Always after that my mother kept a chair close to the bedside, and whenever any of the rats went over the score and ventured on to the table, or over the bed, or nibbled too earnestly at our toes, or in other ways became too boisterous in their nightly revels, she simply stretched out her hand and rattled the chair on the stone floor, without having to go to the trouble of sitting up and striking a light. The riot would subside immediately and the rats would behave with becoming decorum for the next half hour or so.

III

Our breakfast at Dolphinton was quite an institution. It consisted of a soup-plate full of deliciously cooked porridge. The method of doling out the precious milk for this repast always appeared to me to be stingy in the extreme. Of course, it is common knowledge that in the majority of farms where milk is a revenue producer the smallest quantity of it is sorely grudged for home consumption. It was so at my aunt's. Every quart of milk that could be got was sold or churned.

Our plates of porridge would be set out in a row on the window sills to cool thoroughly, as milk goes

farther with cold porridge. Then the dishes would be set down, one under the nose of each impatient youngster, while my aunt would march round the table, a jug of milk in one hand and a table spoon in the other. With great care she would scoop out a spoonful of porridge from the centre of each dish and set it on the side, then she would fill up the hole she had made with a single spoonful of skimmed milk. At a signal from her, we would be permitted to proceed.

There was no second spoonful of milk; no one ever thought of asking for it. And at that time none of us knew of so revolutionary a person as Oliver Twist.

The same stiff formalities obtained at dinner-time and the menu seldom varied: all we could eat of mashed potatoes, and one little slice of home-made cheese. How we used to look forward to that, the important meal of the day! The idea of getting as much of anything as we could eat was overwhelming. But we never allowed the idea of it to interfere with our appetites, no matter how overwhelming the idea might be, and it would have been a hard job indeed to find one of us able to whistle for a good hour after we rose from the table.

On Sundays we had broth, and mashed potatoes and turnips alternately; but, after all, we seemed to prefer the potatoes and cheese.

Supper comprised a slice of bread and jelly, and whatever else my mother managed to slip under her apron from the larder, as this meal was partaken in our own room and away from the prying and jealous eyes of the others.

IV

Besides the farm, as an additional means of livelihood, my aunt kept a confectionery and general grocery store,

converted into such from an ordinary front room. We children were never allowed into this "holy of holies" unless we happened to have a ha'penny to spend in a wild orgy on a box of sweetie dominoes; and this was seldom indeed, for ha'pennies were scarce. My one source of revenue was an old lady whom my aunt supplied with milk. She resided about two miles distant. My cousin John and I fought daily for the privilege of taking her supply to her, because, once in a long while, maybe once a month, she would open her purse and hand her messenger a ha'penny. She had no set day in the month for this disbursement, and she never took any special note of the person to whom she had given the last one, and so she kept John and me on continual tenterhooks.

On my days, I would hand her her pail obsequiously, and from the door my eyes would watch her every movement like a hungry pup on the look-out for a bone. Mine would be lagging footsteps when nothing hoped-for happened. How different from the radiant gleam in my face and my sprightliness when I struck ha'penny day! My smile would then transmit itself for miles around; my homeward trudge, even when the snow would be up to my knees, would become a regular fairy dance. Not the least part of my enjoyment would be the witnessing of the crestfallen and woe-begone look on the face of my disappointed cousin John.

But the proceeds of that ha'penny generally ended up in a fair divide all round seven or eight little beings. Still, the owner had the privilege of tyrannising over every one of his retainers as he doled out a share, little by little, until the last toothful was crunched and melted away. Then things would return to normal and the erstwhile millionaire would become again simply one of the crowd.

A door led from my aunt's kitchen into the shop, but

this was invariably locked. My aunt kept the key, with some others, hanging by a chain from her girdle, just as I knew Bluebeard used to carry his. The outside door was, of course, always open for the convenience of the general public who had real money to spend. We children were forbidden to enter by this door and had to satisfy ourselves by rubbing our noses against the outside of the window, choosing different parts of its interior before someone else, or wondering what we would buy if we had any money.

CHAPTER THREE

I

A SERVING girl was employed on my aunt's croft. We called her Murn. Every night when we went to bed Murn was hard at work. Every morning when we rose we could see her still at it just as if she had never stopped. All day long she was busy milking, churning, sweeping, digging, planting, hoeing, washing, scrubbing, and serving the shop. I had the idea that she was endowed with some godlike charm whereby she did not require rest, and I think my elders who were in charge of her must have been afflicted with a similar notion, for I never heard a word of sympathy or praise being tendered to her, and I never knew of her having a holiday.

She was a young, good-looking, buxom lass, happy-go-lucky, and afraid of neither man nor beast, although she was possessed of an unspeakable dread of the elements. When it thundered, she stuffed her ears and screamed. When the lightning flashed, she covered up every noticeable piece of polished steel in the house, then went to bed and buried herself right over the head among the blankets; and no amount of persuasion or coercion would induce her to show face again until she was throughly convinced that the storm was over.

She would never venture round the side of the house alone after dark, and during the winter evenings, when daylight would be gone before milking time, she would

refuse to go to the byre by herself. She would promise any of us the Kingdom of Heaven if we would only go with her to the outhouse and keep her company until she got through with the cows.

It is strange how the presence of a helpless boy or girl five or six years old, or even the presence of a dog or a cat, will dispel the imaginary evils of darkness which beset so many nervously inclined human creatures.

My aunt would hurry Murn along.

"Murn, what's got into you this night? It's long past time the cows were milked."

Murn would be tremendously busy on some unimportant task.

"Ay, I'll go in a minute."

Then she would corner one of us, generally myself, and whisper, "Come on with me oot to the byre."

"No. You can go by yourself."

"I'll—I'll show you my mother's album out of my trunk."

"No. I saw it before."

"I'll—I'll tell you a good story when I'm milkin'."

"Not the same one as you told me last time?"

"No; a new one; an awful good one."

"Murn, I'm no' going."

"Och ay, come on. I'll give you something."

"When?"

"When I get my pay."

"How much will it be?" would then be the mercenary query.

"A pennyworth; maybe more. Come on."

As soon as Murn gained her point and her fears were allayed, she would become aggressively bold and daring, and would then take great delight in instilling her vanished terrors into the heart of whoever had been obliging enough to accompany her. Many a time I have stood in that dark, dreary byre, with the wind whistling

and the snow swirling outside, as I held up a flickering lamp, shaking with terror and peering into all the dark corners, as Murn's deft fingers relieved the swollen udders of the munching cattle, and her more than deft tongue narrated some gruesome ghost story about throats that were slit from ear to ear, about livers and lights, about graveyards; about the wraiths that stalked the wood at the foot of our garden, wraiths of murdered people with their gory heads tucked under their arms. All that and more I endured from Murn in the hope of receiving a promised something the first time she got her pay.

I cannot understand now how it was that Murn fooled us so often with her fresh promises, while her past obligations remained unfulfilled. I suppose the pleasure of anticipation is strong in the youthful mind, and, when all was said and done (or rather, not done), we always had the prospective part of the enjoyment.

II

As the summer wore on, my aunt's pig became big, and fat, and lazy, and a great deal of interest was taken in the animal's wellbeing. She had to be fed and strawed before the needs of anyone else were attended to. Nothing was too good for her. Of course, the reason was not far to seek—she was not long for this world.

The visit of the pigsticker was anticipated for weeks ahead and, as he generally had a full day's work performing the last rites at one farm-steading after another until he had completed the district, it was a red-letter time for all the children in the neighbourhood.

Early morning found us perched upon the wall overlooking the sty, our numbers augmented by a great many truants from school, long before what we looked

on as a kind of tournament began. The pig-sticker would enter the sty amid cheers and hand-clapping, his sleeves rolled up in a businesslike manner and an ugly-looking knife in his hand. After goading the old sow, he would spring on her and cut her throat. Her almost human squeals and cries would echo over the entire village as she ran blindly round her sty. We would sit in frozen fascination, not really enjoying the scene but none the less strangely interested, much I think in the way one would watch a clever matador slaughter a bull.

As the sow stumbled and tottered in her growing weakness, the pigsticker would run in again and finish his work by ripping her open. She was then hung up for a time, and later was cleaned and dressed.

Meanwhile, we would follow this "pied" pigsticker, upon whom we looked as a hero who was absolutely devoid of fear and in whom was vested unlimited power. And we were tremendously deferential to him, in the fear that if we annoyed him in any way he might be constrained to mistake one of us for a neighbour's pig.

On to the next scene of his killing we would go, then on, and on again during the entire day, arriving back late in the afternoon, hungry, leg-weary, sick in the stomach and seeing red.

III

One day I was taken to the schoolhouse at Dolphinton. A strange, old-fashioned place it was, situated on the side of the main road, on a grassy plot which constituted the playground. A stone horse-trough supplied liquid refreshment for child and animal alike, and more often than not both could be seen quenching their thirst at the same time.

There was one teacher only to this unpretentious academy, and only one classroom, although a partition divided the senior scholars from the others.

My recollection of the schoolmaster is vague, but I think his methods were sound. He would set one class a task, then leave a favourite scholar in charge while he taught another class; thus going from class to class in a work which was as unending as it must have been harassing.

A favourite pastime of the senior boys who owned pocket-knives was to throw us younger ones in the mud at recess, or "leave time" as we called it. They would then take us up to the master, dirty from head to foot and howling dismally. Of course, they would be commissioned to lead us to the horse-trough to wash us off and scrape away, with their pocket-knives, all the muddy adhesions, a job which usually took the entire afternoon and one greatly preferred by the boys to geography or arithmetic.

I had not been long at school when I was the innocent cause of a little trouble which terminated in my being kept at home during the remainder of our stay in Dolphinton.

The master had been busy with some of the other classes and he had left the juvenile section, of which I was a humble unit, practising a spelling lesson. We found the work tedious, till one of us discovered that quite a shrill whistling noise could be made by blowing lightly upon the edges of the spelling book. The contagion spread and soon all were at it. A peremptory call to order was disregarded by some of us and at last the master came over at the run. I was so intent on my new-found whistling contrivance that I did not notice him. He pushed my book against my face, without the slightest intention to hurt, I am sure, but my nose was in the way and it began to bleed copiously

for the second time in my short career, although not by any means the last time, for my nose contracted the silly habit of bleeding at the merest little tap, greatly to my chagrin later on, when, in almost every youthful encounter in which I got mixed up, I would be bleeding like a stuck pig before I was in any way hurt. In fact, when this weakness of mine got noised abroad, it was a general thing for my antagonist's backers to encourage him by shouting, "Hit him on the nose. Hit him on the nose." However, I got used to this defective plumbing and became the least affected of any at the sight of my own gore.

But at this particular time I was not the hardened rascal that I became later, and the first little drop of blood which fell upon my book made me think I was being murdered, so I set up the most awful howls.

My sister heard my familiar bleatings and came to my rescue. For a teacher to hurt a pupil, and a little one, till the blood came; every scholar was horrified! It must have been terribly disconcerting for that schoolmaster—like being caught with a living but wingless fly in his hands.

Before the entire school, my sister upbraided him for his roughness and cruelty. Then, still wildly indignant and making the most of the dramatic advantages of the situation, she clutched me by the arm and marched me out of the schoolroom and home.

That evening we had a visit from the schoolmaster. He was greatly upset over what had taken place and explained how it had all been an accident. He expressed his sorrow and everyone was satisfied. My sisters were back at school the next morning, but my mother thought her little boy was fully young, and decided to keep him at home beside her a little while longer, an arrangement which obtained during the short time we remained in the village.

CHAPTER FOUR

I

I AM unable to say now why it was we moved away from Dolphinton. It may have been that my city sisters longed for closer communion with my mother. It is just possible that my mother was not satisfied with the conditions under which we had been living. Whatever the cause, the change was made.

We had little trouble in moving. No large dray had to call at the door for our belongings. Our box was packed, and a man trundled it in a barrow for two miles for the sum of sixpence. I know the amount was sixpence, because I inquired of my mother at the time, thinking she had made a mistake and had given the man too much.

Our new home was made at a place called Hearthstone; a row of little, white-washed, straw-thatched houses. These houses clung together like intoxicated pals, on the very edge of a dust-laden, crudely-made, side road which wended under a railway bridge and ended in a sort of sheep track a few hundred yards beyond the hamlet.

Hearthstone was only some nine miles from Glasgow, "that dull, seagirt city of the north," yet it lay as lonely and as secluded as a shepherd's hut on the grazing plains of Oregon.

There was a joyous freedom in the life at Hearthstone.

We were too far out from the city to attend school and we ran about all the time like young savages. My boots gave out and were thrown aside, for it was summer-time. It was many a long day before they were replaced. Indeed, so well did I get used to going without them, that I looked upon new ones as an affliction, and I contracted the habit of pulling them off for comfort and slinging them over my shoulder the moment I got out of sight of home.

Every morning when my mother's work was over, she and I would start out across the fields, among the trees, and hedges, and bushes, in a search for birds' nests; and never did such an interested couple set out on such a search. My mother could tell the species of every bird from the size and marking of its eggs, sometimes even from the situation and composition of the nest.

Every day she and I went on our rounds to see how the various families progressed, and we shared in the delight of the mother birds when their broods took wing and flew away.

All day long, in only an open shirt and a little pair of home-made trousers tied with string, I played about among the grass and stubble, the dust and dirt, swallowing health, midges and other things by the gulp, growing rosy, and strong, and hardened; at times idly lying on my stomach and peering into the grass, imagining every blade of it a giant tree in a great forest and every creeping insect in that great forest a lion, an elephant, a bear or a wolf, with myself, in a detached way, a mighty hunter stalking them: or, reversing myself, lying on my back looking up into the blue sky, feeling as if I were balanced on a pin-point on the topmost pinnacle of the world, almost floating in an infinity so vast that I was nothing at all but a floating sense of consciousness.

II

In the rear of the row of houses at Hearthstone there was an enclosed well from which we all drew our water. And what delightful water it was! It bore the hall-mark of perfection, for it had a live trout in it. I was certain then that a trout could live only in the clearest, purest, crystal waters. At a later period, I ascertained that the trout in this particular pool had had no choice in the matter, but had been put there by the man next door for the purpose of keeping the water clean.

Now I am all at sixes and sevens to know which is the cause and which the effect.

Whenever I was sent for a pail of water, I would sit so long at the edge of the well, with my legs dangling over, watching the sportiveness of that trout, that someone else would have to be dispatched to bring back both me and the water.

But I was not sitting at the well-side for nothing; my mind was working, and working hard. As the trout grew bigger and fatter, my thoughts took shape. I had heard my mother mention one time that she had not tasted trout since she was a girl, and I decided that that fish in the well would make a very nice meal for her and a very pleasant surprise as well. It never made the meal, but it furnished the surprise.

With the son of a neighbouring farmer, I exchanged the rubber ring of a ginger-beer bottle for an old, rusty fish-hook; and with the hook, a stick, a piece of string and a juicy worm, I started in. Everything had to be done with the greatest secrecy, for I knew that what I was attempting to do was wrong in the eyes of the man next door, so whenever I heard a voice or a footstep, I hauled in my fishing tackle

and ducked behind the broken dyke at the foot of the backyard.

For weeks I tried to wheedle that trout. At the end of my rusty hook I hung live worms, dead worms and woolly worms, dropping several old salmon tins of them down the well in the natural course of events. I experimented with snails, blue-bottles, cabbage blades, bees, bread and jelly, "cheugh jeans," monkey-nuts and dog's flourish, but merely succeeded in keeping that scavenging trout working overtime cleaning up the refuse which I was depositing in and around its watery lair.

Of course, there were complaints and inquiries regarding the mess that was being made and there may have been strong suspicions as to who was the culprit, but I evaded all such by slinking off quietly along the road whenever I heard the subject mentioned.

One day, when I was almost giving up in despair the idea of ever being able to land that trout, I found a little red feather, no bigger than my finger nail. I decided on one last try with this. With infinite pains, and some white thread, I secured that feather alongside the hook, and then sat in breathless anxiety as I cast it into the water. As soon as it dropped, there was a flash and a splash, then a tremendous lot of bubbles. Something jerked at my stick. I clutched with both hands; but in another second the trout had me, and I was in the water beside it plump over the head.

By good luck, my mother happened to be turning the corner of the house at the time. She caught sight of my disappearing figure and immediately ran forward, bending far over the pool and hauling me out by the trousers, wet, but none the worse. It was only when she deposited my moist person upon the kitchen floor that she discovered I still held my fishing rod in my hand, and what was more wonderful, the trout, weighing

about three quarters of a pound, was wiggling violently on the floor at the end of my line. My mother knew the temper of the man next door, so she picked up the struggling, gaping thing and ran back with it to the well, where it floated stomach up for a bit, but was soon swimming about as merrily as if it never had been out of its native element.

III

Once, and only once, during our stay at Hearthstone, that I can remember, three of my sisters came out from the city to stay with us over the week-end, and we had a most wonderful time. One of them brought a large paper bag containing chocolate cakes, cakes with sugar icing and chunks of lemon-peel on top, apple tarts and cherry cakes, the greatest array of cakes I had ever seen.

During all that week-end I had one or two of them at every meal, and one in-between-times instead of the usual bread and jelly. This sister was connected in some way with a large bakery business and her master had heard that she was going on a visit to the country to her young sisters and brother, hence the bountiful supply of the Saturday night left-overs.

Another sister brought two pounds of brown sugar with which to make candy. In the manufacture of this delicacy she was considered an expert. Late that Saturday night we all sat round the fire, on boxes, and boards, and chunks of wood, with no light but the glow from the open hearth, watching the boiling sweetness as it bubbled and gurgled and frothed, tasting samples excitedly and commenting on its flavour, asking questions and volunteering suggestions as my sister experimented with the sticky mess in a teaspoon and a cupful of cold water.

At last the boiling sugar was carefully poured out into a large buttered plate, and then for safety it was put on the topmost kitchen shelf to cool. It never would have got the length of cooling had it been placed anywhere nearer our reach.

We had the pleasure of scraping the inside of the pot between us, but not a taste from the plate above would my sister let us have until the next morning; so we had to go to bed at last to dream of cakes and candy all night.

On getting up next morning, my sister's first care was to inspect the candy on the top shelf. We stood round in our nightshirts in anxious anticipation. As she brought down the plate she gave an exclamation of alarm, throwing it on to the kitchen table in disgust. Firmly embedded in the centre of the now strongly set mess was a nice, fat mouse, dead as a red herring. My older sisters were a bit pernickety with their town breeding and insisted that the stuff be thrown out at the back door at once. With horror on our faces and tears in our eyes at such suggested waste, we children pleaded for it. We were successful in our pleading and were told finally to take the sickening sight out of the way.

The candy was separated from the plate in a single piece, mouse and all; and for a week we ate round and round that mouse, getting closer and closer to it all the time. Then my mother interfered, and much to our regret threw what remained of it far across the fields and we never saw it again, although I remember making a hunt for it on the sly that very afternoon.

My sisters immensely enjoyed that week-end in the country and were anxious to indulge in such holidays more often. Owing to the great distance we were from transportation, this was next to impossible, so it was decided that we should move once more, this time some

two miles nearer to the city, to a hamlet called Kennishead, within a stone's throw of the railway yet right in the heart of the country, where there were woods, and fields, and rabbits, and weasels, and pheasants, and everything else dear to the heart of a healthy youngster.

Our moving this time was not done by a humble wheel-barrow. It has to be understood that we were getting on in the world. The work was performed by the man next door, with a cart drawn by a real, live horse with four legs and a tail. I had the pleasure of riding all the way to our new abode, perched up on top of a pile of our household goods, inside the upturned kitchen table; while my two sisters and my mother walked alongside, laden with the teapot, the mirror and other precious breakables, including a mavis in a cage, none of which could be trusted on a rickety cart.

CHAPTER FIVE

I

My mother had rented two back rooms from a couple in humble but comfortable circumstances who could ill afford the space we required on account of their own large family, ranging as it did in monotonous, stairlike regularity from a few months old to fourteen years. Yet this couple could as ill afford to retain their rooms on account of the mouths and stomachs which had to be satisfied.

The first time I saw the good woman of the house she was sitting by the fireside suckling a chubby babe. At intervals during the proceedings she drank tea from an earthenware teapot which she evidently kept continually simmering on the hob, ready at a moment's notice to satisfy her only form of dissipation. All the time I knew her, that picture seldom changed; the same teapot, fresh tea of course, and a new youngster.

She was a big, buxom, fresh-complexioned, simple-minded country woman, with full red lips, great dark eyes and black hair; handsome as a goddess in face and form, yet never seeming to look her best, for she slaved from morning till night, washing, sewing and cooking, and fiercely admonishing her romping boys; ever in a scrambling haste as if she were endeavouring to catch up on some time she had let slip. She betrayed a general disregard for tidiness in her dress and a harassed

look seemed ever to be lingering in her face. Her hands were big and rough from ceaseless toil. Those hands! I tremble at the thought of them now; at the thought of those vigorous palms, descending with lightning rapidity and tireless energy on the bared skin of one or another of her unruly offsprings, the smacks sounding like the noise of a quick-firing machine gun, high above the yells and cries of her squirming culprit. It used to strike an icy-cold dread into my very marrow, as I shivered behind the closed door of our room, fascinated and scared, reviewing my most recent past and wondering if I also had not done something wrong and if she would pounce upon me next and administer a similar dose.

She did not often resort to the use of the strap; the threat to do so usually proved sufficient to bring her most recalcitrant offspring to a proper sense of his littleness. Judging from the appearance of the strap she possessed, as it hung from a nail at the end of the kitchen mantelpiece, it must have had the sting of an angry wasp. Only once did I hear its terrorising swish and clip and that was when one of her boys had carelessly lost some metal tokens while on his return trip from the co-operative store in a neighbouring village. The sound of that instrument of punishment made me pale and sick with fear.

Sometimes, when I misbehaved rather badly, my mother would threaten to take me to the landlady to have her administer a spanking. That threat brought me to immediate submission, for I felt that if ever the good lady undertook the job it would be all up with me. I felt sure I should die of the very thought before she got the length of applying her introductory skelp.

Yet, despite all this, a better and more kind-hearted woman never lived. She loved her children dearly and would have worked the flesh from her bones for any one of them. But they were so many, and they

were so vigorous and unruly, that it needed a firm hand, literally and metaphorically, to curb the animal that ran wild in them, and runs wild in every boy who is worth his salt.

The entire method of chastisement was new to me, for I had not been punished corporally since the canary died, and I sensitively shrank before the infliction of physical pain.

II

Although my mother and I kept up our bird-nesting excursions, I found I was gradually growing away from her in the sense that I preferred scouring the woods and climbing trees with other young colts of my own age.

We boys were never happier than when crouching among the underbrush, with beating hearts, in some forbidden preserve, watching from our hiding-place the eager and suspicious gamekeeper as he stalked along, searching here and there in the hope of catching some young marauder and having the pleasure of depositing him by the nape of the neck and the seat of the trousers over the low, dry dyke surrounding the wood. When the keeper did manage to lay hands on us, he went through every pocket carefully and felt all over our clothing—not a very hard job—to see if we had been harrying birds' nests.

Generally he dealt leniently with us boys with whom he was more or less familiar, whose homes fringed the woods, but he was relentless on the others from the nearby town of Pollokshaws when he caught them trespassing.

One day as I was sitting alone astride of the dry dyke which separated the Big Wood from the highway, wondering what I might do next, a lanky, bare-footed boy came sauntering down the road, throwing up a

cloud of dust with his shuffling feet at every step. He had his hands deep in the pockets of a pair of trousers which were torn up the thigh and hanging in flapping streamers. He wore a much-holed and faded navy-blue jersey. As he came along he was whistling in a manner which showed he hadn't a care in the world.

When he got up to me he stopped, looked at me and grinned, showing two great, protruding, white teeth which gave him a hungry, horse-like appearance. He had a prominent nose, two big saucer eyes that looked pathetically on the world, and high cheek bones that endowed him with a gaunt look. Sitting jauntily on his head, he had a blue, Balmoral bonnet, beneath which a mop of wavy, dark auburn hair streamed.

"Hullo," he saluted.

I wasn't altogether satisfied with him, but his smile was reassuring.

"Hullo," I answered at last.

"I ken you. You stay at Kennishead," he added, with a nod to indicate the direction.

He scrambled astride the dyke and faced me.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Peter," he grinned.

"Peter who?"

"Oh, just Peter. I come from the 'Shaws. My faither is up seeing old Wullie Himlin."

Wullie Himlin I knew for the man in the little cottage down the road from us who had been sick of something for some weeks.

"Wullie Himlin is in his bed," I vouched. "He's got something wrong with his windpipe."

"Ay. He swallowed a herring-bone that cut him all the way doon, then he got blood-poison in the cut in his throat with chewing tobacco."

"No; it's just a cough he's got, for my mother told me."

"But I'm telling you it's a herring-bone that did it, for my faither told me."

As a father's opinion was reckoned the last word in those days, I, of course, had to let it go.

"Here, do you ken where I could get some mavises' eggs?" he asked.

"There's lots in the Big Wood. But it's no' fair to steal birds' eggs. What do you want them for?"

He edged up closer.

"I ken it's no' fair, but you can get money for them."

Then, in enthusiasm, he unfolded his scheme. It was simplicity itself, and perfectly logical to me. Mavises were grand singers, but wild mavises would not live in cages. If wild mavises could be raised by the hatching of eggs out in the woods under wild mavises, then surely tame mavises could be raised by hatching the eggs in a body's own chicken-house under a tame bantam hen. And then, tame mavises would sing, would live in a cage decently, and would sell for money.

It was a well hatched scheme worthy of a juvenile genius; and, as I discovered afterwards, Peter was a genius at hatching schemes, although not so in the hatching of mavises' eggs.

I knew scores of mavises' nests in the Big Wood, so we started out. In less than an hour we were in possession of several dozens of eggs.

Naturally, we were afraid that the gamekeeper would find us with our spoil, so we moved along very cautiously, Peter, lanky and big kneed, had his Balmoral bonnet, a splendid hiding place for anything up to the size of a football, and the last place in the world that anyone would be likely to examine. So, for greater security, we filled Peter's Balmoral almost to overflowing, replacing it gingerly on his head. The bonnet sat a little high and maybe a little precariously, and Peter had to walk like a tightrope artist to preserve his proper

balance, but notwithstanding, there seemed so comparatively small a chance of detection that we did not allow any foolish fears to alarm us.

We were going along as fast as we could to get out of the wood, when we ran smack into the arms of the gamekeeper. He must have scented something unusual, for he was very pleasant to us and passed his hands over our clothing in a most familiar manner. He had finished with me and was almost through with Peter, when a twinkle in his eye set our toe-nails rattling.

"Man, you're standin' awful straight. What's wrong with ye?" he asked. "Have you got a poker up your back?"

"I—I've got a stiff neck, m-mister," stammered Peter.

"I can see that. Can you waggle your head?"

"No; my neck's that stiff."

"Try, man, try. Waggle it."

Peter made a most miserable attempt to oblige. "I can't, m-mister; it hurts awful."

"That's a nice bonnet you have on," continued the keeper, shifting to more dangerous ground. "Is it a real Balmoral bonnet?"

In unison with his thoughts, Peter's face turned to the sickly colour of the yoke of an egg.

"Ay. Ay. It is a new one, m-mister. My mother bought it for me at the co-operative," he answered with a pathetic smile and in an endeavour to make conversation.

"But it doesna fit your head very well," went on the keeper.

I was now looking for a convenient opening for escape, while Peter put his hands up to his bonnet in an endeavour to adjust it.

"Is that any better?" he inquired, timorous, but obliging.

"Tuts, man," remarked the keeper testily. "Jam it doon. Jam it doon." His huge hands came down on the top of Peter's head, snuffing out completely the last spark of spirit that flickered in him.

Slimy yolks and whites at varying stages of incubation, and broken shells, oozed under the rim of my companion's bonnet, over his eyes and ears, into his gaping mouth and down his neck. And the more he spluttered and tried to clear away the mess from his face, the more the apparently unending stream oozed and flowed.

The gamekeeper stood back and roared with laughter. I fled, Peter followed, groping his way blindly.

We cleaned off the sticky mess as well as we could, but nothing that we attempted seemed to make any improvement on the mat of hair and eggs which was rapidly drying on the top of Peter's head.

I left him at the corner, as he continued down to Wullie Himlin's place.

Half an hour later, through a hole in the hedge at the foot of Wullie Himlin's garden, I saw Peter sitting penitently on a chair in the yard, with a big sheet round him and his father, big, grim and bespectacled, jerking Peter's head this way and that, as he went roughly and thoroughly over it with a hair-clipping contraption belonging to his friend, Himlin. A short distance off, Peter's young sister, whose name was Maggie, was weeping quietly as she watched the distress of her hero brother.

As he worked on Peter's scalp, Peter senior was berating his offspring soundly.

"Gettin' eggs to take hame to your mither, were ye?"

He brought the hair-clippers a sharp rap over Peter's head. Peter howled dismally, and big tears welled down his cheeks.

"As if anybody wants rotten eggs and half-hatched chickens to eat. You big gomerel."

Rap went the clippers again on Peter's head. High to the heavens rose Peter's accompanying wail of anguish.

Maggie joined in a fresh lament.

"Oh, faither, faither," she moaned, "don't kill him. Don't kill oor wee Peter, faither."

Peter made the most of this support and responded with fresh yells of distress.

And so the lecture went on, Peter howling in anticipation of cracks over the head that never materialised, and Maggie intervening every time her father shifted the hair-clippers a suspicious inch from her martyr brother's scalp.

CHAPTER SIX

I

KENNISHEAD was a little more civilised than Hearthstone inasmuch as it could boast of no less than two confectionery shops, converted from handy bedrooms in the same way as the one owned by my aunt at Dolphinton. In addition to these permanent establishments, numerous road vendors plied their trade at our doors.

Every day the baker, or the "parleyman" as he was better known, came trudging along the road, white with flour from the knees up and grey with dust or mud from the knees down according to the state of the weather, pushing a basket arrangement on wheels in which he carried his stock-in-trade. His impending arrival was always the cause of a tremendous activity and interest on the part of every youngster in the hamlet; even the hens and ducks would gather on the roadway in anticipation.

The baker had the work of his life keeping us at a safe distance. We swarmed round him in droves, climbing onto the axles of the wheels of his handcart and peering into the baskets the moment he raised the lid, venting exclamations of wonder and desire as we gazed on the heaps of scones, and buns, and sugar cookies, whose moist, rich, bakehouse odour floated up and caused us almost to swoon with covetousness

as it entered out greedy nostrils. Even the baker's catlike care and windy remonstrances could not prevent one or another of us from picking out a stray currant here, a loose raisin there and a dab of sugar somewhere else. Sometimes, if we were lucky, we would succeed in making off altogether with a parleycake while his attention was centred on some ready-money customer.

That parleyman was a mystery to me. I could never understand how he managed to get the length of Kennishead without giving way to the well-nigh overpowering temptation to sit down at some quiet part of the road and eat up his entire stock-in-trade all by himself.

II

Another road-merchant, who came about once a week, was of even greater interest to us and with a farther reaching influence than the parleyman. He also had a barrow, and was usually clad in part of the same material as was piled up in front of him. He generally wore a black boot on one foot and a brown one on the other, sometimes a boot and a shoe, all without concern or pride. His hands were always dirty, his finger nails were long, his beard was grey, matted and unkempt; he had a hooked nose which betrayed his nationality. He wore an old battered hat. But, when all was said, he was ours—our very own. At one time, though, I felt as if I were his, body and soul.

His call at Kennishead was entirely a business one between him and us children.

This merchant was Jake, the Jew candyman, with his heaps of verminous rags, mawky bones and dirty bottles. How he used to urge us on by encouraging words and a lavish display of his wares for exchange!

How we used to scour every nook and corner of the house, and out of it, for rags, and bones, and bottles! Many a duster, many an old petticoat (sometimes one that was not so old) were spirited away in anticipation of Jake's coming. If one of us knew where the other had his little pile hidden, we stole from it with unblushing nerve, then fought like mongrels over a bone when challenged. And all for a paper windmill, a paper parasol, or a mean little piece of dirty, yellow candyrock fished out from a wooden box tucked well way under Jake's pile of filthy rags and rubbish.

I still bear a grudge against Jake's candy, for it was not all candy. It had black gritty parts in it. These we had to spit out, as they would not chew up with any degree of pleasure. I have a strong suspicion now that Jake's stuff was home-made and that the gritty bits consisted of cinders.

This candyman had a habit of running us into his debt; and once we were in, woe to us. It was the hardest thing in the world ever getting out of his debt again. That is a characteristic of debt.

But I am grateful to Jake in a way. He taught me my lesson young, and cheaply. From that time to this I have never allowed my liabilities to exceed my assets.

Jake would take what was proffered him, sniff at it, weigh it in his bony hands and pull a long face.

"No. It isn't enough. Take it avay. It isn't vorth a single speck of candy, let alone a vindmill."

But he always held on to the rags.

After a bit he would seem to relent. He would place his grimy finger under our chins and tilt our faces up to his.

"Yes, you have a nice face," he would say, looking over his innocent, "and ve have been doing beezness for a long time. Here is the vindmill. Take it queeck before I change my mind. But, remember, you owe

me two rags more. Have them sure for me the next time I come, or I vill get the policeman on your track; and the jail is a bad place, a very bad place. I know, my poy, for I have been there."

III

One day Jake came along the road heralding his approach by a series of shrill, penetrating whistles which brought us round him from all quarters. He had a little metal whistle in his mouth, and we soon found out that he had half a dozen more in his box.

"Here you are. Here you are," he cried. "Gather up. Whistles. Whistles. Gather up. Gather up."

There were many anxious inquiries as to the cost.

"Two bottles, twelve rags and six bones; nothing less. And I vill only vait half an hour."

Never was there such hurryings and scurryings. Every boy rushed to his secret hiding-place and brought out his savings. To know where so many of these articles of exchange came from would indeed be a revelation. When the sorting time came every boy in the hamlet had the requisite number of rags, bones and bottles; every boy but me. With the exception of one miserable bone, my little horde had been purloined. Around me was the deafening whistling of my companions. I stood at the shafts of the barrow, my solitary bone in my hand, the picture of misery.

The good business he had done, more than my dejected appearance, must have touched the leather boot-sole that acted for a heart for old Jake. He clapped me on the head patronisingly. I can feel and smell his clammy clap yet.

"Never mind, my son," he said. "Give me your bone, and here is your whistle. But remember, you

still owe me two bottles, twelve rags, and five bones; and von rag, von bone and von bottle for interest. Pay me as soon as you can, and I will knock off the bone interest. And, if you don't, there is alvays the policeman, and the lock-up, and the snitchers."

Little cared I for stone walls and prison chains. At that moment, I would gladly have pawned my soul for one of those whistles. But when the whistle was lost and I next encountered Jake, my knees quaked and my heart failed me.

Diligently I saved up and earnestly I tried to pay off that monument to the past. It weighed on me like the National Debt. Rag after rag, bone after bone, bottle after bottle I paid, but always Jake, the inexorable old scoundrel, kept piling on the interest with a chuckle, a leer and an admonition, intimidating me and threatening me before the others until my life became a burden. Finally I grew sick of paying and I made up my mind that I would just go to jail if I really had to, but I would pay no more. Whenever Jake hove in sight after that I would make off, never showing face until he had finished his business and had become in appearance a dirty speck of dirty candy in the distance.

Soon after this temporary relief came to me, for we moved away once more, again a few miles nearer to the city, but still in the country.

At an odd time from our new quarters at the top of the back road of Pollokshaws, I would see Jake a long way off and my conscience would smite me. I would hear the prison doors creak and the chains rattle, and I would feel the skin of my forehead tighten and grow cold.

Long years intervened, when I espied Jake for the last time; the same old Jake, grey, unkempt, unwashed, trundling his barrow along, shouting his same old cry, luring the children of a newer generation in the same way as he did the older.

Once more my prickling conscience spoke to me, stronger than it had done for many a day. I decided to have done with the past and Jake for all time.

"Here, Jake," I shouted from the pavement as he passed.

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir," he replied, touching his battered hat. "Does the gent vant me?"

"About fourteen years ago, you old humbug, I owed you two rags and a bottle which I never paid. How much do I owe you now?" I demanded.

"Do you vish to square it off in goods or money?" he asked.

"Money."

"Vait; chust let me see. Fourteen years is a long time. Ve vill call it square for sixpence, and it is dirt cheap at that." His crafty old face ran into a crackled smile that reminded me of a piece of corrugated brown paper.

"There you are then, you thieving old skinflint. There's your sixpence," I cried, throwing the coin in his face.

It caught momentarily in one of the brown paper corrugations, then it slipped down his open shirt. As I gave a backward glance at him, I saw him groping in his hairy bosom in his miserable endeavour to rescue the money from his ragged garments.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

THE reasons for our fresh migration were numerous and good. I was getting on for seven years of age and so far I had been at school for only a few short weeks. The tuition of my two older sisters had also been neglected. It was therefore considered advisable to move to the outskirts of the town of Pollokshaws, then a thriving place with about twelve thousand inhabitants; with schools, and churches, and shops—to me a huge city—only some five miles from the heart of Glasgow but right on the fringe of all the beautiful, free, open country lying beyond.

Again, my sisters in the city had been missing the home life which all young women should have. Our new abode brought them within hailing distance of their places of business, thus enabling them to travel to and fro, morning and evening.

Ours was a modest little home, consisting as it did of only two rooms, known as a *but and a ben.* We had two beds in the "but" and two more in the "ben," so that the seven of us fared fairly well when we were all together, which was only at sleeping time.

We had a door to ourselves, with our own key; a pretty little porch fronted with glass, a coal shed all to ourselves, a wash-house which we shared with our neighbours—each family having a special day set aside

every week for the use of it—and a nice little garden in one corner of the bleaching green. Never again did we have to rent rooms or act the part of the despised but necessary lodgers; so that this marked another epoch in our onward march.

How my mother worried and slaved for us in those days, and, in fact, all the days of her life, I never seemed to realise except in flashes. I took everything for granted in a careless, haphazard, boyish way.

It is only in the light of after years, when the refining processes of time have done their work, that all the old happenings, the loving words, the kindly acts, the sacrifices of those who encompassed us in our childhood days, become sorted out before our eyes as in a display cabinet, enabling us to lay a mental finger on this and that and with confidence to acknowledge—to the loving devotion of a mother; to a father's mature judgment; to the sound advice of an old friend; to the noble example of a companion; to the optimistic cheerfulness of a casual acquaintance; to the happening of some singular event; and, to ourselves least of all, as we look back over the intervening years—undying gratitude for what we are and what we still hope to be.

How often the soft tones of my mother's voice used to slip in between our childish quarrels and make us ashamed of ourselves!

"Agree, bairns, agree; for you'll be parted yet."

An old-fashioned saying, but a true one in almost every family. It was true in our case. Of the three to whom it was addressed, one is dead long years ago and six thousand miles of sea and land have lain between the remaining two for a score of years.

My mother did not believe that sparing the rod meant spoiling the child. She had a thousand ways more loving, more poignant, more effective. When all else failed with me, she would put on her hat and coat, take

up her handbag and go out hurriedly, closing the door behind her, presumably with the decision to put her previous threat into execution, the threat to go away and leave me. The sound of that closing door used to send a fear into my heart that I would never see her again. How it did work! My temper and anger would vanish before the awful possibility. I would run out, catching up with her before she got to the corner of the road, and cling to her and cry, "Mother, don't go away. I'll be good. I'll be good."

She would bend down and crush me to her and kiss me. And all would be forgiven. Then she would take my hand and we would walk up over the hill, on to the grassy knowe overlooking the town; and up there, away from everybody, she would tell me of the danger that lurked ahead for those who could not master the passions that ever strove to master them; of the meanness of a lie; of the value of books; of the necessity of knowledge; of the throbbing hopes she had for me; of the great work that had been done by boys born in far more lowly circumstances than mine were; of the illimitable things that could be accomplished by untiring industry. And as we rose to go home again, she would conclude always, "But, oh laddie, my laddie, above them all, if you grow up to be good, I'll be content."

With my little bare feet I would patter along by her side, my eyes as bright with laughter as hers were dimmed by tears: yet both of us on the same sweet plane of heavenly happiness.

II

I was taken to the school on the Back Road, that old academy which has turned out so many thoroughly equipped to take their places in the world, with a solid groundwork upon which any career, from a plasterer's

labourer to a prime minister might be built, although through no fault of its own it has accounted for more labourers than Government leaders.

With the exception of the few weeks I had had at Dolphinton, and some eighteen months at the end of my school days when the senior classes of this school were amalgamated, for the sake of economy in teaching, with the senior classes of a newer school under the same board, all the school tuition I ever had was imparted to me within this fine old pile of solid masonry.

It was not long before my teacher discovered that, although I had been two years later in getting to school than was generally the case, my education had not been entirely neglected. I could read a little, spell a little, and count a little, before I began with her. The result was that I passed quickly through the most juvenile of the juvenile classes, instead of crawling along laboriously. In a few months I was in what was termed the First Standard, alongside boys of my own age and a little older. From there, onward, the promotion was made annually after the usual Government inspection.

Those extra two years in and around home, running free yet never entirely without the curb, went a long way in building up a more sound body than I might have possessed had I been subjected to earlier confinement in the schoolroom.

It was a strange democracy that foregathered in the classrooms in those days. The sons and daughters of landed proprietors, of steamship owners and of wealthy farmers, rubbed shoulders with the progeny of coal-heavers, town-house loungers, tradesmen, second-hand junk dealers and the orphan bairns from the poorhouse. There was no snobbishness; not even a thought of it. Had there been it would have been quickly knocked out. It was the great triune, "Liberty,

Equality, Fraternity," the last mentioned being, of course, with the reservation for the settlement of differences.

In the winter, strong efforts were made to have all the school children supplied with boots and shoes, and only in a few isolated cases, generally the fault of the scholar himself, could one find a child with red, chapped bare feet and legs, shivering schoolwards; but in rainy weather there were few of us whose boots did not "let in," and bare feet under such conditions were the lesser evil.

In the early spring, when the first watery blink of sunshine spoke in the faintest of whispers of an approaching summer, not all the efforts in the world could have induced us to don another boot and stocking for the next six months to come. The soles of our little feet became tough as leather, so tough indeed, that the stubble in the fields could hardly injure them nor could the penetrating thorns so greatly hurt.

The nicknames by which we were known to one another at the school were strange and picturesque. They usually touched the spot with bull's eye precision, laying bare some eccentricity in the form or manner of the owner. When there was no apparent connection between the name and the person, it could be taken for granted than an older brother, the father, or maybe the grandfather of the boy had aptly fitted the appendage and had been saddled with it long years before, the name thus being handed down from father to son, "even unto the third and fourth generation."

There was one boy, for instance, whom we called "Pinny." I never knew why until I was in his house and saw his old grandfather sitting at the kitchen fire with his wooden leg resting on a chair in front of him, getting warmed, as he said, at the fire. He had lost his limb when attending that same school, and

"Pinny" had been tagged to him, and to every member of that family who had attended the school since.

Some day I may go back to verify what I already know to be true, and I shall be surprised indeed if I do not find a Bulsher, a Spunk, a Beastie, a Shalley, a Midge, a Daddy, a Pie Tam, a Bauchel, a Sconey, a Dwal-de-Weedle, and a Butts among the present generation now attending, as I could have done several generations farther back.

III

Then, as now, football was the prince of games. All the year round we played it, and with anything from a newspaper rolled up and tied with string to a brass door-knob. No one thought of purchasing a ball, for the very good reason that the purchasing of anything with us was next to impossible. Still, it was seldom that one or another of us was not without a fine, hard tennis ball: the regulation article for our playground games. We could shoot and head with it with an accuracy that would have astonished the manager of a first league team.

Our method of procuring our balls was simple and effective. On the outskirts of the town, on the Eastwood Hill as we called it, where the aristocrats of the neighbourhood resided, there were tennis courts encompassed by tall fences of wire netting. But, the fences notwithstanding, a ball would fly over once in a while. The moment it did, its doom was sealed. Behind every bush surrounding the courts there lurked a figure, and every figure shot out from its hiding-place almost before the ball had definitely decided upon which side of the fence it was going to land. Sometimes it would be caught in the air by an eager, upward-leaping being. At other times, a free-for-all scramble would take place

for its possession, and the ladies and gentlemen inside the courts would stop their game for a bit to enjoy the spectacle.

This method of obtaining our balls must have been going on for years, for no effort seemed to be made by the owners to recover their property. When a ball got out of bounds it was practically given up for lost. Not that it would have made any difference had they behaved otherwise, for long before the players could have got outside of their wire entanglements, the place would have become lonely and dead as any graveyard, and not a boy would be within sight or earshot.

Our football games were a source of great worry to an old lady whose garden was on the other side of the high school wall. Incidentally, this old lady was a source of great worry to us. She was a widow. She owned a goat upon which she lavished all her accumulated and superfluous affections. If our ball happened to get kicked over the wall, the boy responsible for the mistake was hoisted up and over, in company with one other. The extra help was needed to hold the goat by the horns while the first boy secured the ball, as Nanny had a nasty, disagreeable, treacherous nature. Very often Nanny and the two trespassers would become inextricably mixed up in argument, then the widow would appear on the scene. When she did it would be every man for himself and the devil get the hindmost.

The nanny-goat lady made many complaints to the schoolmaster, arguing that the excitement was bad for the goat and affected her milk supply. But the protests of Nanny's owner availed little, as it was seldom she could point out the culprit of the particular offence of which she complained, and when she took a random guess at one we were generally able to prove his alibi.

"The brats are all alike," she would growl. "But if you were half a schoolmaster you would strap the

whole jing-bang o' them, and you wouldna be far wrong."

On an odd occasion I have known her to take the law into her own hands and carry a wriggling, shouting youngster into her kitchen, loosen the button or string which held his nether garment in place, put him over her knee and lay on all she knew how. Little sympathy did such an unfortunate boy receive when he appeared back in the midst of us, tear-stained and miserable.

The one objectionable feature of all our school games was the silly habit most of the boys had of using bad language, some of it most horribly vile; shouting and bandying it lightly and thoughtlessly, interposing the most ordinary phrases and conversations with it and never omitting it when there was an angry altercation going on. In nine cases out of ten, the meanings of the words were quite unknown to the boys, but their use was common among senior footballers in the country towns; teamsters addressed their horses with oaths; drunks in the street wallowed in the same vituperations; quarrelsome women threw it across the road at each other; it was the shibboleth of travelling tinkers and showmen. Therefore, it is not to be wondered at that the boys, with their lack of discrimination, considered the use of bad language a grown-up touch. It was simply a matter of example; had it never been heard it never would have been repeated.

In those earlier days, there was no supervision in the playground. Later on, there was a janitor, but boys had the habit of looking down on janitors, when they did not ignore their presence altogether. Besides, the janitor was generally busy looking after the heating or cooling of the classrooms, if he was not out hunting truants, or smoking surreptitiously in some out-of-the-way corner.

The boys who did not swear were looked upon as

"mealy-mouthed," effeminate, or what touched the sensitiveness more, especially if there were a slight endeavour on the part of the boys so called to be as good in behaviour as they could, were dubbed, "Christians." That word used to be uttered with the fiercest sneering.

A remedy might have been found in having a teacher in the playground, mixing freely with the boys during all the time they were at play, and it seems strange to me now that, with hundreds of boys together, this was not done. It might have meant much to the morals of the community.

When football practice games were on, everyone was allowed to play, but to get into the class team which played against other classes was a harder task than joining a secret society. Nothing short of sheer ability carried any weight. It is strange too, but those eleven positions were always filled by a kind of acclamation. There never seemed to be the least doubt as to which boy was best suited for each place. The secret of this might be found in the fact that we were not over-organised and we did not go much on discussion or argument; demonstration was what counted.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

ABOUT this time I received a gift from my brother, who resided in England and travelled for a clothing firm. It was a gift that I would have much preferred he had kept back. It was in the form of a knitted suit of clothes, with a cowl to match. The cowl had a long, woollen tassel which hung over the side. Think of it! And I was a boy going to school. Unfortunately, when choosing that suit, my brother forgot to allow for my last year's growth. When I came to try it on, it fitted me like skin-tights; in fact it was only after discarding my under garments that I was able to get it on at all.

I surveyed myself in utter contempt, and I strongly resented this infliction that was being imposed on me, knowing full well what kind of a reception I would be sure to get from the boys at school if ever I dared to show face in such a guise.

"I'm no' goin' to wear them," I cried passionately.

"What's wrong with them? It's as fine a suit as ever you had on your back, and it came out of a real tailor's shop, too," said my mother soothingly.

"It's no' for boys. It's wool, like stockings. Only babies, and monkeys—and—and lassies wear them ootside," I complained.

"Wool is the warmest cloth in the world. The boys here don't wear them because they cost too much money," she argued.

"Look at it. It's no' even black or dark blue; it's the colour o' the ribbon o' a lassie's hair."

"Sky-blue is all the go in boy's suits this year," pertly put in one of my numerous sisters, as they gathered round me that morning to press home my mother's arguments, in the fear that she might be inclined to weaken.

"Look at it," I cried again, now in tears. "It's too tight. It fits just like the skin o' a sausage."

It did too, for it was straining to bursting point at every bulge. I could hardly walk across the floor in it. I knew I never could run in it, and football in it would be hopelessly out of the question.

"You that thinks it so nice—I would like to see you wearing it," I remarked to one of my sisters.

Someone giggled. My temper gave way and I started to peel off the objectionable garments. I was stopped before I got very far.

"You should be black ashamed of yourself," admonished my mother. Needless to say I was.

"Many a bairn who has no clothes would be glad to have such a nice, new, woolly, clean suit. You should be real thankful you have a big brother so mindful of you."

Any of the bairns to whom my mother referred would have been heartily welcome to the suit so far as I was concerned, and I would have felt more thankful to my brother had he been a little less mindful, although I had not the courage to express myself so clearly.

"You look fine in it," said my youngest sister.

"I never saw you look nicer in anything," reassured another.

"You're just apt to imagine things. If any of the boys try to make fun of you, it'll be because they're jealous."

I had learned years before that it was worse than useless to argue with a woman, and I knew how futile my little, plaintive protests would be against six of her. But notwithstanding, I must admit they almost persuaded me that the suit was not so bad after all; when one of them, as she struggled to refasten a protesting and recalcitrant button of my jacket, giggled again.

I was quick to notice then that their blandishments were all a scheme, and I started in to cry.

My sister protested that she was merely laughing at my woebegone expression, but still she kept on giggling.

She was finally pushed into the adjoining room with a remark from my eldest and most prim sister that she always spoiled everything.

I can see now that it was a serious matter, and I can understand how disappointed my mother must have been, for I went through a lot of clothes; clothes cost money, and money was scarce. And, at that particular time, there was nothing on hand that could be made down to fit me.

Finally strong measures were taken with me; my schoolbag was thrown across my shoulders and I was bundled outside. I tore off the cowl and threw it far into the backyard. I hung around sulkily until I got weary of my own company, then I shuffled off to school, slowly and gingerly, by all the back lanes and sideways I could find.

I was late in getting to my destination and, as I had no excuse to offer, my teacher relegated me to the foot of the benches among the duffers and the worst-behaved boys of the class.

As I went to my seat, there was a murmur of merriment, which the teacher promptly suppressed; although

my sensitive eyes detected an amused yet sympathetic smile playing in his face.

I suffered agonies all that forenoon. I was alongside a boy called Sam; an untidy, unkempt, dirty-faced rascal and a mean, tricky bully who was always spoiling for a fight. Sam insisted that I should prompt him when he got stuck in his memory work. I did so for a while, but one time, as I was loosening a button for greater comfort, I forgot about him, with the result that he blundered and got strapped for it.

Then commenced a series of kicks and shoves which made my already overheated blood boil. I was only a little fellow for my age and I had so far been in the habit of suffering such indignities in discreet silence from all boys of Sam's calibre.

Whenever the teacher turned his back, Sam twitted me about my clothes, asking me where I got the bathing pants, then passing the joke along the forms. Once or twice he tried to pinch me, but I had the advantage of him there; my trousers were far too tight to allow of him getting any hold between his thumb and forefinger.

As we rose at eleven o'clock for ten minutes' recess, Sam pushed a pin into me as far as it would go, which was quite a long way. In my compressed condition, the pain was maddening and it made me bite my lip. But I was not afraid of Sam any more. I kept alongside him until we were in the playground, then I wheeled about and struck him straight between the eyes with all the force I could muster. I heard a rip as I did so, but paid little heed to that for my mind was elsewhere. Sam staggered from the blow and almost before he had time to recover we had a crowd around us all eager to see the fun.

I never could have done anything with Sam at an ordinary time; I never would have attempted it. But

at that particular moment I was ready to fight with my own shadow. I was angry with my brother for starting all the trouble; I was angry with my mother and my sisters for their silly notions regarding boy's dress; I was angry with my teacher for consigning me to the foot of the class; I was angry with the boys for their derision; I was angry with Sam most of all.

In two minutes my nose was issuing its usual bloody complaint, adding greatly to the interest of the onlookers and to the picturesqueness of the encounter. Every swing I made, every evasion, every twist and turn, was followed by a sound of ripping and bursting seams; my movements soon became less hampered and I could feel the breeze playing about my legs.

No one was more surprised than I when the fight was all over. Someone hit Sam. I must have been that someone, for I was his sole antagonist at the moment, but how or where I hit him I never knew. Anyway, he flopped to the ground, clutching at his lungs, or his liver, or whatever else it was he had tucked away under his breastbone. Sam refused to get up; an acknowledgment of his defeat.

As I was being applauded for my flukey victory, the teacher appeared on the scene. He ordered Sam and me into the classroom, where he admonished us severely, giving each of us two hundred lines to write out for him by the next day.

He then took me aside.

He belonged to the older school of teachers, was fond of a "wee drappie" on the sly, and was endowed with a strong antipathy of sneaks and bullies.

"Man," he said, "I'm glad you did it. I was watching that rascal at you all morning. That was a grand fight; I saw it from the window. I was coming to interfère a while ago, but I saw you were getting the best of it, so I let you be. But, laddie, why didn't you

hit him harder that time you had his head against the wall?"

That was exactly what I had been metaphorically kicking myself for ever since the opportunity had been missed. But I was surprised that the teacher should also have noticed it.

"Run away home," he continued. "You're hardly in a fit state to been seen. Tell your mother to let you put on your old clothes; they're good enough for the school; they stand the wear and tear better, particularly the *tear*."

He laughed as he looked at the ribbons and loose strings of wool which hung on me. "And never mind the two hundred lines," he whispered, as I set off, pell-mell, for home, where I discarded my woollens with undisguised delight, never to put them on again.

That fight with Sam was merely one of many in which I was destined soon to take part.

I have always found that the ability in fisticuffs, and in other things also, of a big, robust boy is taken for granted; while a boy of small physical dimensions is called upon every minute of his existence to prove his claim and to assert forcibly ordinary rights which are acknowledged and conceded to his bigger rivals. No doubt this accounts for the popular fallacy that small men are the more aggressive. They only appear so. But the fact is, they are more often called upon to prove their mettle. Besides, they are naturally anxious to be in the forefront to see what is going on. The forefront is their rightful place for they would have no chance of seeing from the rear.

CHAPTER NINE

I

My victory over Sam was dearly bought, although I have always hated to admit it. With an upper cut, or a jab, or some such pugilistic love-tap, he broke one of my side teeth, and from that day I became the victim of that malady so poetically referred to by Rabbie Burns as "The hell o' a' diseases". Burns knew what he was talking about. Of all the infernal afflictions to which flesh and bone are subject, toothache comes an easy first. And strange it is that it should be the one for which the sufferer gets least sympathy or commiseration.

Any boy at school who owned a "shoogly" tooth was considered quite a curiosity, and was often called upon to exhibit it to his admiring chums. I was seldom without this mark of distinction, with which, however, I would gladly have dispensed, as the glory was not commensurate with the martyrdom.

Day after day, as a tooth here and another there caught the contagion, this racking torture went on. The malady seemed to choose birthdays, holidays and Saturdays for its especial entertainment. When the sun was shining and my chums were outside waiting for me to complete the gang for some desperate enterprise, I would be lying on the hearthrug nursing and hugging my aching face, groaning and grunting the while and not

caring whether the world blew up or turned itself inside out.

Dentistry was then a luxury known only to the affluent or to the aged whose own teeth had given out and had been replaced by a plate of false ones. The extravagance of sending a youngster to a dentist to have a cavity filled was unthought of. When the worst came to the worst, which was seldom indeed, we were sent to the family doctor who obligingly yanked out the offending molar, or some other one, and charged a shilling for the operation. No matter which tooth he extracted, we were always glad to admit to him that the toothache was entirely gone, for he would have had no compunction otherwise in yanking out another.

I can well remember one old farmer complaining of having been grossly overcharged by a dentist in Glasgow.

"Man," he exclaimed, "it's terrible: he sat me doon in a chair and nippit it oot in twa seconds without a pain or even a twinge, an' then he had the cheek to charge me hauf-a-croon; and mony a time auld Ben the blacksmith has done it and dragged me three times round the smiddy on my hands and knees, an' me yellin' for mercy; an' he never charged me mair than a schooner o' beer for the job."

My young mind never had experienced anything in the way of faith healing at that time, any more than the baby trick of kissing to make it better, but I did have it borne in on me that a pleasant surprise has a wonderful effect on the toothache.

One Saturday afternoon the inferno of a thing was clinging to me with a persistence which I felt sure was gradually driving me mad. I was squirming on the rug, standing on my head and kicking the fender in an endeavour to obtain relief, trying alternately hot water and cold, pepper and salt, when someone dropped something on the back of my head. I did not look up.

The something was dropped on me again. I turned with tear-stained face to remonstrate, when I discovered bending over me the smiling countenance of the sweetheart of one of my sisters; and what was more interesting to me, I noticed a great, life-sized, leather-covered football—the same as the men played with in cup-ties—rolling away under the bed.

In two seconds the toothache was gone. In ten seconds more I was gloating over the wonderful gift, and in another twenty seconds my sister's sweetheart and I were out on the grass enjoying ourselves as if there never had been such things in the world as aches and pains.

He must have been fond of boys, that big, hearty engine-driver, or else he was particularly smitten by my sister's charms, maybe a touch of both, for I can remember him spending hours with me in the manufacture of a kite as large as a man and, after it was completed, paying for a great ball of string and taking me up on to the Knowe to show me how to fly it.

That was the greatest kite ever made; the envy of every boy who saw it. It had a short life and met with a violent end. I used to let it out full length until it was a mere speck in the sky, until its tugging became so great that I had to hold on with both hands, my legs coiled round the legs of the summer-seat to prevent the kite taking me up into the air with it.

Many a time I had a fear that I would sail away at the end of the string, summer-seat and all. I would go on dreaming and wondering what I should do if such a thing really did happen and I were carried off. I knew I would have to let go my hold unless I wished to be dashed to pieces. I used to fancy that if I clung on, I might land on some foreign shore, maybe infested with cannibals and wild beasts, and have as many adventures as Robinson Crusoe.

One day, while we were all on the Knowe and the kite was floating lazily almost straight up in the heavens at full extent of the string, an ugly-looking man came along and stood by, watching. He had a knife in his hand with which he was paring down a plug of tobacco. With a twisted grin on his glum face, he put his hand to the string and held the thin cord between his thumb and the sharp-edged blade of his knife. He looked over at me and grinned again. I screamed to him in my fear, but he only grinned the more and pressed the blade against the strands, slicing them through at a stroke. He spat on the ground and walked away, as I sat on the summer-seat dumb with grief, watching the beautiful bird of a thing diving, and darting, and tumbling to the earth, head downward, as if it had been shot while on the wing.

It struck the roadway with a crash, a broken, torn, crumpled mass of wood and paper.

I wept bitter tears over it, but all that was worth taking away was a tangled skein of twine.

I was learning that there were two kinds of men in the world; those, like the engine-driver, who are inventing, building and beautifying, and by their efforts bringing delight, and pleasure, and good to themselves and to others; those, like the loafer, with the knife, for ever cutting and hacking, knocking down and destroying, leaving in their wake only sorrow, bitterness and hatred.

II

I liked the engine-driver man. He has left a strong, unforgettable impression on me, although when I knew him I took his gifts and his entertainments as a matter of course, being like all other boys of my age, little burdened with a sense of gratitude.

The engine-driver was not what one would term a handsome fellow, for he had lost a bone from the bridge of his nose, which had left a hollow where a hillock should have been. I used to gaze upon his deformity with the deepest interest, and I daresay it was in response to my impertinent questioning, during some temporary absence of my sister, that he told me what had caused it.

He had been under the engine. Just what he was doing there I do not remember. Had I been an American youngster I would have taken it for granted that he was under there looking for tramps who were trying to get a free ride under the carriages. Had my hero informed me that he was under the engine prying it up with his back in order to get it over some man they had run into, I would have believed him and thought him quite capable of the mighty feat. Anyway, he was under the engine. When in this most dangerous position, the train began to move. My friend immediately lay down full length in the centre of the track, and the engine and tender, seven carriages and the guard's van passed over him. He would have escaped without hurt had there not been a chain, with a hook, swinging from the guard's van. And that is what did the damage.

It is only now when I begin to dissect the story, that I am enlightened. I fancied for many a long day that that hook which swung from the guard's van was of the barbed, fishing variety on a large scale, and I used to picture with enjoyable horror my engine-driver being dragged along by the nose behind an express going at the rate of a hundred miles an hour, until by some marvellous intercepting of Providence, the bone gave way and so saved his life.

Engine-drivers, and others, should always be very explicit when telling stories to boys. There is never

any saying what construction the latter are apt to put on anything not fully explained and it may be taken for granted that if there is a wrong one and it is at all picturesque, bloodthirsty, gruesome or absurd, that is the construction they will fasten to.

Of course, after all, the fault is really with our English language, which so economically doles out the same words for a variety of meanings, thus lending itself readily to the eccentricities of a boy's imagination.

CHAPTER TEN

I

My sister got married, but not to the engine-driver. Her new home faced the recreation park. This proved much to my internal advantage, especially during that glorious year when the schools in our neighbourhood were closed down for a time on account of an epidemic of the measles. Never was an infectious disease more welcomed than this one was by those of us who proved measle-proof.

With increasing delight, we watched the classes thinning. When rumours went round that there was a likelihood of our school shutting down altogether if matters did not improve, we counted our numbers every morning with bated breath, afraid in case we should find, by some mischance, an increase in the attendance, so injuring the prospect of the proposed drastic measures of the School Board being put into execution.

At last, in a sad, funereal voice, our teacher announced the final decision to close up entirely for two months. Those of us who remained accepted the melancholy tidings with mild cheers.

Our teacher asked us to guard against the disease, and suggested that first thing every morning we should write a kind, sympathetic letter to some little sufferer, also, for two or three hours every day, we should revise our lessons in anticipation of the coming examination.

And so, every day during those all-too-short joyous two months—with short intervals across the road to my sister's for drinks and pieces of bread and butter—I and a few kindred spirits played football from morning till night, till our heads grew dizzy and our legs should have been giving way at the knees, with our feet worn down to stumps.

We did not open a school-book, and we fell sadly in arrears with our sympathetic correspondence to our "measley" companions; but we contrived to enjoy ourselves with almost the same gusto as a healthy boy experiences when playing a long truant.

I had a habit of remaining at my sister's house as long as I could in the evenings after tea, with the result that it was generally getting dark when I started out for home.

There was a long, narrow, unlit, dismal part of the road, with high walls on one side, which never failed to give me creepy sensations. This stretch of road was called Coustonholm. I was not afraid of animals, or even men; in fact I had the habit of standing beside the last flickering lamp-post on the corner until I espied a man going my way, no matter how vicious or repellent looking he might be. I would tag about a yard behind him and so reach light and safety at the other end of that most uncomfortable stretch of loneliness—the light of the townhouse and the safety of the proximity of the police station.

I had an inborn dread of the presence of a strange, intangible, supernatural something which is supposed to associate itself with graveyards and old castles, a dread which became accentuated always in darkness and in the absence of other human kind; a something no doubt encased in most of us, which brings, however, not merely a hope but almost an assurance that Beyond are other kindred we have yet to meet and experience,

other worlds we have yet to see, other problems we have yet to face and solve.

II

It took a long time to break us scholars in again to the steady routine of school work. We had been running wild, and now we chafed under the restraint. The strap was much in evidence, and our excuses for unlearned homework and for absence were as varied as they were lame, and they were so lame that they had to be propped up by the crutches of the most unblushing falsehoods.

It was necessary then, as it is now, for the scholar to bring a written excuse from his parent or guardian for any such lapse, but from obvious reasons this was not always convenient. However, we had no trouble in slipping out of the difficulty, as many parents were poor hands at either writing or spelling; some indeed could not write at all. So, a line written by the delinquent scholar himself, providing it was signed or crossed by his parent, was considered by the teacher as sufficient to meet the exigencies of the case. Any scrappy scrawl of a signature would pass muster—in fact, the more scrappy and scrawly it looked, the better chance it had—so our job was easy.

I had a chum, the son of a farmer. He and I put our heads together and signed lines for each other, asking the teacher to let us off half an hour early every afternoon during the latter end of the summer—he being required for the purpose of assisting in the harvest; I being required at a shop at which I was supposed to be serving in the capacity of a sort of half-timer. This, of course, was all the veriest fiction. The fact of the matter was that John had received a birthday gift from his father of a fine stallion donkey and that donkey

was chafing in the stable, anxious to be tried out; just as John and I were chafing in the classroom, anxious to be out to try him out.

How that last, long, dreary, weary half-hour between three-thirty and four p.m. used to tick out its lagging seconds! The big hand of the clock seemed anchored mysteriously to three-thirty. The donkey used to loom up before us until it assumed the size of a war-horse, with lightning darting from its eyes and smoke belching from its nostrils. Small wonder then that we took advantage and practised the little deception we did.

Our trick worked like a charm. Day after day, John would leave at three-thirty for his work on the farm, while I would leave for my drudgery in the grocery shop; to meet on the Cart Bridge five minutes later and fly off together to saddle our prancing steed.

The arrangement might have been working yet, if fate, in the form of Sam, my old antagonist, had not intervened, and our pleasure came to an abrupt and somewhat painful termination.

As luck would have it, Sam got a real job with the same grocer as I was working for in an imaginary capacity, and in due course my schoolfellow presented a petition to the teacher asking to be allowed off early every afternoon, putting forth the reasons for his claim in full detail. The teacher began to think that this grocer must be conducting a large and increasing trade and he made it his business to investigate. The result was calamitous. John and I had to imbibe a serious lecture on the crime of forgery—which was the classification of the heinous offence we had committed—with all the disturbing pictures of years and years in prison, surrounded by green and oozy walls, subsisting on bread and water, if it had so happened that what we had forged had been a bank cheque instead of a line to get away from school half an hour early. And, as the

principle was the same in both cases, we were sentenced to remain in school one hour longer every day for every half hour we had so villainously stolen by forgery.

John punched Sam's head for his fat-headedness in getting a job that wasn't supposed to be vacant, but it did not afford us much satisfaction as we sat out our penance in that great, empty schoolroom the teacher standing with his head down over his work, the boys outside shouting and laughing in the playground, and John's donkey in the stable braying its head off—but whether in sympathetic loneliness or asinine delight, it is hard to say.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

SHORTLY after the school took up again, we got a new schoolmaster, who brought with him a number of pupils from the school he had previously taught in the same parish. Those new pupils were a source of interest, not to say antagonism, and it was several weeks before they became anything like assimilated.

When they made their appearance in the playground for the first time, bunched together for protection and support like the early Christian martyrs among the lions in the Coliseum at Rome, I was attracted by the appearance of a tall, rangy individual whose arms and legs seemed to be endeavouring to get as far away as possible from the extremities of his garments. He had the eyes of a startled horse looking over a wall at a passing train; his teeth were prominent and a thick mop of reddish-brown hair straggled over his forehead, while the front part of his cap hung rakishly over his left ear. Something strangely familiar in his make-up seemed to awaken memories in me.

That little band looked too formidable to quarrel with in a heap, so the most of our boys sheered off until a more convenient season should present itself for the demonstration of prowess—when the "twos and threes" would not be gathered quite so much together. But I still remained alongside, gaping at the big fellow, feeling drawn to him in some way, probably because he

was as tall as I was short and as angular as I was rotund. He was finishing the last juicy morsel of an orange when his eye caught mine. He wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his jersey and gave me a knowing wink.

Then I knew him for Peter, the mavis tamer. He beckoned me with an upward, backward jerk of his head.

"Hullo," I hailed.

"Hullo, yoursel'," he grinned, showing his teeth.

I went up to him, gazing foolishly at his head. It was years since I had seen him last.

"I see your hair all grew on again," I remarked.

"Of course, hair always grows again. My faither says it grows too quick."

He pulled his hand out of his pocket and opened his palm for my inspection.

"Do you know what these are?"

"Ay. They are iron washers."

"You're wrong. They're cakes o' chocolate."

"You're daft," I said.

"They're cakes o' chocolate—one—two—three—and if you don't believe me come on and I'll let you see."

With a jerk of his head he moved off, and I followed wondering what kind of conjuring trick he was about to show me. We ran across the road to the railway station and up on to the station platform, by the side-way which was used for sliding down milk butts and the only way to the platform which did not lead past the booking-office window where the clerk could see us.

Peter looked about cautiously. The platform was in our sole possession.

"Watch the stairs and whistle if you hear anybody coming," he instructed.

He made for a penny-in-the-slot machine which contained butterscotch and chocolate. My heart throbbed with excitement. With the dexterity of a

practised hand, Peter inserted a washer in the slot. I watched in breathless anxiety.

There was a click. The washer worked.

Peter pulled out the drawer and handed me the first packet. He repeated the operation with like results, then we stole across to the milk chute, sat down, let ourselves go and tobogganed on to the roadway, where we gobbled the fruits of Peter's cunning.

"Did I no' tell you," he crowed.

"Ay—but you've only got one washer left."

"I ken where there's lots mair," he replied. "In Jimmy Calligan's yard where he keeps the second-hand machines he buys, the ground is just full o' them. The only thing I'm frightened aboot is that they'll get fly for us and stop putting more chocolate in the machine up at the station."

"But is it no' stealin', Peter?" I asked, after my share of the spoil was safely under cover.

"No—it's just swapping. They're the very best kind o' washers and the chocolate folk can sell them for money if they like, or use them on their chocolate-making machines when anything goes wrong wi' the ones that are on them."

"But you have to steal them from Calligan's."

"No. Calligan doesna want them or he would have them locked up. I don't believe he kens they are in his yard."

I was satisfied; and Peter wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his jersey as if to wipe away an odious subject.

From that moment, there sprang up an affinity between Peter and me, an affinity for mischief and fun, an affinity which drew us together into so many scrapes that, for our own physical comfort, we dared not fall out, an affinity which made us as necessary to each other as bread and ham are for the combination called a ham-sandwich.

II

Despite all the scrapes and troubles we got into, there were times when we must have been fairly well-behaved, for it was only the boys who were exemplary in their conduct who were chosen by the school-teachers for any special service, and I can remember on two occasions at least when Peter and I were called upon for special duty.

The new drawing pencils had to be pointed every season before being distributed among the scholars, and as that was a nice, easy job, which was required to be done in the open on account of the mess the small wood-shavings made, there were always more volunteers than pencils. The necessary qualifications were, good behaviour and a pocket knife. Peter and I were fortunate in being credited with the first qualification and we were luckily in possession of blunt specimens of the second, so we were told off with some other eight boys for the much-envied task.

For a time we worked hard and earnestly down in the sheds under the school, happy in the relaxation from our lessons and making the job spin out as long as possible. But Peter had a tennis-ball in his pocket. At intervals when the work became a bit irksome, he would take it out and bounce it a few times on the concrete floor. Then he would go back to his pencil sharpening, re-refreshed and reinvigorated. Unfortunately, this was like the craving for strong drink, every time Peter resorted to the ball it required a little more bounce and a little more play to key him up to the requisite pitch for fresh labour. He was busy "stotting" it, when someone flicked it out of his hand and it rolled away among the feet of someone else, who was so busy sharpening pencils that he could not stoop to pick it up and hand it back to Peter.

He tipped it across with his foot. In a minute, some twenty feet were itching after that little piece of rubber. The ball was intercepted before it got Peter's length, and the inevitable happened. It had been threatening to happen from the first moment that Peter had fetched the ball out of his pocket.

Pencils were laid aside in a heap and a stampede was made for the playground, where sides were quickly chosen and an exciting game was started, all in the most astonishing quietness.

After about half-an-hour's uninterrupted enjoyment, we became careless. Forgetful shouts flew with greater frequency. One of these shouts must have penetrated to the classroom, for when we were piled ten high in the thick of a scrimmage at the mouth of one of the jacket-and-cap goals, an angry voice which we knew so well put a stop to our pleasure.

It was not altogether unanticipated, and although we looked sheepish, we were not seriously perturbed. We boys had long become fatalists in the matter of being found out and there was nothing we ever did without, in a subconscious way, first counting the cost; without weighing the pleasure against the pain; without making sure of the pleasure by seeing that it came first.

Not for a long time were any of us chosen again for special service, but gradually the old incident became forgotten and, when spring cleaning seized the teacher, Peter and I found ourselves once more in the vanguard; this time for the purpose of bestowing a thorough cleaning to the inkwells. These were of the inverted, top-hat, crockery kind and one sat in front of each pupil in a round hole in the desk. The ink had first of all to be emptied into a pail, while the dirty inkwells were placed in another. We were none too nice or careful about the job and we had the pleasure of wiping off a number of old scores by dropping ink splashes

here and there on the trousers of our less fortunate rivals.

When we started down to the basement to the work of rinsing and cleaning, we had no thought of doing anything that would call for admonition; in fact we had a strong desire to do our best to demonstrate to the teacher that we were really capable and desirous of showing him that his trust was well reposed. But, unfortunately for our good intentions, when we got away from the supervising eye and were outside by ourselves, an inkwell foolishly tumbled out of the pail and got itself badly chipped.

"Jings. But you'll catch it for that," remarked Peter.

"I couldn't help it. It fell out itself," I said in a woebegone way. "Will you no' tell if I fling it away?"

"We're no' clipe-clashers. Fling it away if you like," said another boy.

I drew my arm back to do so, when Peter ran in and stopped me.

"Jings, don't waste a good cracked inkwell. Let us have some fun out o' it. Put it on the top o' the dyke and let us fling stones and try to hit it."

The spirit of the game caught on immediately. But the inkwell was no sooner on the wall than a well-directed shot from Peter splintered it into smithereens. He gurgled in delight.

"That wasna fair, Peter. We never had a shot at it," I cried.

"Well—there's plenty mair where that one came from," said Peter.

"It was a fluke," put in another boy. "You couldna do it again if you tried fifty shots."

"Could I no'? I could hit them nine times oot o' ten; ay, and you into the bargain."

"So could anybody," I cried, "if we only had the chance.

The upshot was that the pail of innocent inkwells was brought out from the basement and a row of a dozen little "top hats" was set along the wall. We rushed for armsful of stones and soon a steady fusillade was flying.

Turn about, a boy replaced the targets as fast as others knocked them down or gathered fresh ammunition. Hilarious shouts burst out from each of us as our shots hit their marks. It was only when the place looked like a proverbial china-shop after a visit from the bull that the excitement slackened.

One of our number suddenly stopped and slinked into the basement. Another and still another must have followed silently. Peter and I were alone, wondering at the sudden silence, when I looked round, then up at our classroom window. Our teacher was standing there in full foreboding view, watching our every action.

"The teacher," I gasped, ducking and running for the basement. Peter quickly followed. And we whispered and shivered down there, afraid to go back into the classroom.

But, as the mountain would not go to Mahomet, Mahomet came to the mountain, and he brought his strap with him. He lined us up against the wall and lectured us on the meanness of deceit, on the wasting of time, on the destruction of public property, and on the betrayal of trust, until we felt like shamefaced fleas on a white sheet slinking for cover from a suddenly switched on light.

In addition to the stereotyped "six-on-each-hand," we were compelled to write out one hundred times, in our best copy-book caligraphy, "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

CHAPTER TWELVE

I

As a whole, there was little social intercourse between the boys and girls attending school. We had the habit of leaving one another severely alone, living our own separate and strangely different lives.

The girls considered us rough, noisy and untidy, all of which, no doubt, we were. On the other hand, we looked on them as we would on china vases, too clean for utility, too brittle to handle and good only to be set on a shelf and admired, or at least looked at, for, after all, we did not admire them much. The breach between us was so great that no one ever considered it worth while to make any attempt to repair it by anything approaching mixed companionship.

But in spite of all this, one and another of us would be seized occasionally with an insane infatuation, as inexplicable as it was sudden, for some little, demure, blue-eyed maid who probably sat across the aisle all unconscious of her charms; or, likely as not, the object of our strange interest would be some mop-haired, shapeless, over-grown gawky; for there was hardly any accounting for tastes, although it might have been possible to find an ulterior reason if a deep enough probe were made.

I know that I fell head and ears in love with one little clean-faced girl simply for the reason that she played

the piano for our physical drill and possessed a polite, sweet-toned, deep voice; with another because once I tipped up her seat when the teacher's back was turned and just as this little lady was about to sit down. Because of my action, she sat down lower and more hurriedly than she intended. I felt very mean after it and I was sure she would complain to the teacher, but she did not and so I became her devoted slave for at least a week. I succumbed an admiring victim to a third on account of her red hair and her social position; her father was a minister and she possessed a strange little lisp.

But most unaccountable of all was my one-sided "affair" with another who sat next to me at drawing lessons. Instead of being winsome, she was big-boned, pale-faced and had large, starey eyes. If I happened to take out my pocket-knife to sharpen my pencil, she would snatch it from me.

"Lend me your knife," she would snap, after she was in full possession.

"No, it's mine," I would protest.

She would go on whittling as if she had never heard me, and when she finished she would throw the knife on my desk in front of me.

"There's your old, blunt knife. It isn't any good anyway—you cheeky-faced thing."

One day she changed her tactics. "If you please, would you lend me your knife?" she pleaded in a plaintive, little voice.

I might have known there was something underlying, but she attracted me and I was so surprised at the change in her that I handed it over dumbly. She deliberately opened it, grabbed up my rubber which lay beside me, and before I could understand what she was at, she sliced my rubber in two, keeping one half and throwing the other back at me.

I was horrified. "What did you do that for?"

"What do you think? I lost my rubber at dinner time, and I have to have one, haven't I?"

"Well," I said, "I'm going to tell the teacher about that."

"You do," she flashed viciously between her teeth, "and I'll—I'll——"

I snapped my fingers to attract the teacher's attention.

The girl was on me like a she-cat and she finished up by bumping me off the end of the seat on to the floor of the aisle, to the merriment of the entire class and much to my discomfiture.

If I happened to have any candy, she demanded and got half of it as if it were her due.

At drawing lessons, when boys and girls sat together sometimes, she was ever taking up more room on the form than was her fair share.

"Move up a bit," I would plead.

"What's the matter with you, grumpy? Do you want the whole school to yourself?"

"No, but I would like my own seat."

"Don't chat back to me," she would return, as if she were my maiden aunt. And she would conclude by leaving a scratch on my cheek an inch long.

The peculiar part of the whole affair was that the more she scratched and snarled the more I seemed to like her. That was my first experience of being thoroughly bullied by a girl who was not my sister.

But the one I liked best of all and for the longest period was she who used to smuggle to Peter and me some elastic, plastic, indigestible concoction of her own baking when we were folding up the tables which the girls had been using during their weekly cookery lesson. This young lady had early found the surest way to a man's heart, and I can say with sincerity we were ever too gallant, or maybe too hungry, to throw away any-

thing she gave us, no matter how tough, how half-baked, or how over-cooked it might be. Those were the days before we had reached the age of discrimination in matters culinary, and anything that teeth could go through was considered by us good and welcome lining for perpetually hungry stomachs.

But all this love-making was of a very timid nature on the part of the ladies of our affections, if with them it went on at all; and it was very sheepish, half-hearted and gawkish so far as we were concerned, consisting as it did of writing the young lady's initials over and over again, in secret, on our slates or on the inside of our copy-books, prompting her, underbreath, when she got stuck in some memory work and, once in a long while, sharing an apple or lending a purloined tennis-ball, for, unless our affections were hidden away safely from the other boys, we would be likely to find ourselves subjected to a ridicule which would be kept up long after the poor, sickly, weak-kneed, little flirtation had died from sheer neglect.

If there was anything that we were sensitive of it was ridicule. We feared one another for that more than anything else. This fear tended to make us, to the outward eye at any rate, very much of a pattern. There was a certain, unwritten, unwavering line of conduct which we had to follow if we hoped to slide along without attracting undesired notice.

II

On possibly four occasions during the year a chance visitor to the school would have been greatly surprised to note the burnished and almost painful cleanliness of the boys and girls who sat in full muster, stiff, attentive and expectant. The most serious call for such violent

and drastic preparations was the annual Government inspection, and the least important was when the supposedly official photographer came with his huge contrivance to operate on us in batches, producing in a few days proofs of wax-work-like impersonations intended to represent a group of scholars, a copy of which could be had for sixpence, cash with order.

Once only was I able to indulge in such a luxury, and I swaggered my apparent affluence before the boys for many days after it happened. I had just got over a severe attack of whooping cough, a malady which had left me thin and run-down, with an irritating affection in the throat which, with a little encouragement, might have developed into something serious. On that account it was no more than natural that a special effort was made at home, the sixpence gathered up and permanent record of me purchased and stuck on the mantel-piece in the best room, to tell future relatives—in the event of the worst coming to the worst—what I looked like before it came.

This expenditure, besides being an extravagance, proved unwarranted. I survived the cough and I am now running the photograph a neck and neck race in the matter of longevity.

The events which straggled in between the Government inspection and the photographing were the semi-annual Bible examinations, in which every minister in the parish had to have a hand and a tongue.

These were unlike the Government inspection, inasmuch as they were always a soft, gentle, kidglove affair, punctuated by smiles and highsounding and encouraging words delivered in mellow tones, accompanied by patronising pats on the head. To us, this was like slipping in past the harbour-bar after a long, dirty night outside in the storm of wind and waves, as the methods by which we were elevated to such questionable heights

of Biblical perfection in our memory work were by no means of the kid-glove order.

We crossed the Red Sea with the Israelites, by aid of the strap. The tawse were our "Pillar of cloud by day and our pillar of fire by night." That strap was our "widow's cruse" that never failed. We sang the Psalms of David and chanted the paraphrases because it meant *hell* for us if we didn't. We repeated long screeds from the twelfth chapter of Romans and from the sixth and seventh chapters of Matthew with a phonographic precision which never could have been injected by brotherly love alone—at any rate, it never was.

We bandied the shorter catechism, question and answer, question and answer, with the ministers, with an astonishing familiarity, eliciting words of admiration, "How splendid." "What perfect training." "How deliciously refreshing." The ministers were examining the finished articles: we had been through the "Fires of Moloch" in the process of grinding and refining.

What if we did put the wrong construction on some of the questions!

"Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?" Personally, I always pictured a man dropping from a tremendous height from a balloon into the private estate of Sir John Stirling Maxwell, our local landed proprietor, while the sinfulness, to my mind, consisted in his not paying more attention to the notice, "Trespassers will be prosecuted."

What if we did repeat, "Who through this weary pilgrimage has *stole* our father's *leg*," "Unto the hills I lift *my knives*," and sang, "We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the *cheese*," passing ministerial inspection at that.

There seldom was any attempt at explanation or elucidation on the part of the teacher, and there was

little or no desire for any on the part of the scholars. It was just so much enforced work which had to be got over, like a dose of castor oil.

But at the same time, it was more to be recommended than no religious training at all; for years afterwards, the old verses, the old sermons, the old questions and answers, come back and straighten themselves out in the mind's eye, their true meaning coming like a revelation at the awakening of the inner man.

While I think the sacred truths might have been imparted with a little less vigour through our material senses and a little more of the spirit of the teaching itself, I must admit that the religious training which has made the most lasting impression on me and which has remained longest in my memory is not that taught even in the Sabbath school, or at the hearth, but in the day-school, under the glaring eye and the peremptory voice of the teacher, with the dread of the strap, not in the background, but well to the forefront, within easy reach of a none-too-gentle arm and where all could see and feel it.

One thing I still am unable to understand, and that is why the boys got thrashed for offences which the girls also committed and got off with, for the average girl of school age is as strong, if not stronger, than the average boy, and quite as mischievous.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I

It is astonishing how varied and interesting our pastimes and amusements were in that little town of Pollokshaws. There was always something new afoot. The moment the school was over, we rushed home for a hunk of bread, sufficient to tide us over till supper-time, then we would be out and off again on some freshly concocted enterprise.

The boy who owned a donkey was considered as high up on the social scale as a prince of royal blood and was greatly envied and sought after by his less fortunate fellows.

There was a considerable vogue in donkeys at that time in my juvenile career, judging from the number of the animals owned by the boys of well-to-do parents. But as donkeys cost somewhere in the neighbourhood of ten shillings and sixpence each, they were as distant from Peter and me in the matter of personal ownership as the stars in the heaven, and therefore just as attractive and desirable.

I was acquainted with several proud possessors of these light-footed animals. By exchange and barter, and a certain amount of well-placed flattery, not to mention a cheerful disposition, I contrived to extract no small share of the pleasure of a donkey's companionship without having to burden myself with the embarrassment of feeding, stabling and cleaning. Thus early, I discovered, although not quite in its concrete form, that

friendship is more to be valued than riches; that friendship *is* riches.

But there were times when we were at outs with every boy in the neighbourhood who lorded it over a donkey, and such a condition always seemed to obtain on the occasions when the longing was strongest in our bosoms to be careering along the dusty roads, perched on the back of one of those sportive little beasts, or running alongside, guiding it and patiently waiting our turn to be astride.

Early one holiday morning, Peter and I were standing idly at the Round Tollhouse wondering what on earth we were going to do to amuse ourselves. On the day before I had quarrelled with one donkey owner, Jimmy Calligan, and Peter had bled the nose of another, Andy Dodds. The only remaining one we were acquainted with was Johnnie Aitkenhead, who lived several miles away and, consequently, was out of the immediate question.

We knew where young Calligan's stable was, and we fancied if we got there before Jimmy was about, we might be able to steal the loan of his donkey and get away with it for the day, as there were no fastenings on the ramshackle stable door, and Calligan's yard afforded easy access.

We decided to have a try, and, as a preliminary measure, we ran home for enough provisions for the enterprise, returning with packages of bread and treacle, wrapped in newspaper and securely tied with string.

Our bare feet pattered noiselessly into Calligan's yard. There was no one in sight; all was still and quiet. Even the dog seemed asleep. I kept watch at the gate while Peter slipped into the little stable. But he no sooner got inside than he let out a whoop and a howl, and landed back through the doorway into the yard.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

Peter rubbed his leg and laughed ruefully, showing his teeth.

"I couldna see very well, and I stroked the donkey's wrong end," he remarked. "She doesna seem to be in a very good humour this morning."

The donkey's name was Bell. We went in together to her. We spoke to her soothingly and fed her on well-nigh a bale of Calligan's hay before she condescended to allow us to stroke her nose. With a great deal of manœvring, we succeeded in getting a rope round her neck, and after half-an-hour's tug-of-war performed all over Calligan's yard, we managed to get the bit in her mouth and the harness over her ears. We could not find the saddle, so we decided that saddles were not only unnecessary but a nuisance, and better done without.

Peter stood holding Bell by the head while I mounted, then I stood holding her by the head while he mounted, but as it looked as if this performance might go on indefinitely without any probability of both of us getting astride at one time, and as any minute might disclose the unwelcome presence of young Calligan and end our adventure before its beginning, we concluded that it would be better to hurry the stubborn brute out into the country, So, with Peter in front pulling, and me behind prodding at leg's length with a stick, we started on our trip to the Red Hills.

When we got clear of the town, we agreed that Bell was out for our pleasure and that the sooner she understood this the better. Several wild and unsuccessful attempts were made to get astride. A farm labourer, who had been enjoying himself for some twenty minutes watching our futile efforts, volunteered to hold Bell securely by the head while we clambered on her back.

Bell showed the whites of her eyes, brayed, struggled and tried to back; but the farm hand was up to all her little tricks and kept a firm grip until we were perched precariously astride of her. We had not got properly settled—for Peter and I were sitting back to back—

when the man let go with a shout and a resounding whack on Bell's flank, and off we careered like a whirlwind.

Bell ducked. I hung round her neck. She flung her heels in the air. Peter's hands clamped on to her tail with the energy of a newly-released rat trap.

There was little or no horsemanship—or, to put it properly, donkeyboyship—on our part, and no pretence of anything ladylike on the part of Bell. It was simply a case of the survival of the fittest. We all were fit enough individually, but none seemed fit for the other. Peter bumped and gasped at every yard; I joggled Bell's head and Bell jolted both Peter and me unmercifully. But still she kept forging ahead, up hill and down dale, with a zigzag, ostrich motion which made us dizzy and weak.

At a particularly rough part of the journey, I heard a shout behind me. The bumping and gasping at my back ceased. From this I gathered that Peter had gone over the tail-board.

Bell shook herself like a wet terrier and galloped on, madder than ever.

Suddenly, she stood stock still, her head darted between her forefeet and her hind quarters shot in the air. She balanced for a second or two, but she overdid it, and she and I rolled head over heels on to the grass at the side of the road. When I sat up to take my bearings, Bell was several yards away, struggling frantically to free her reins from the stump of a tree upon which they had providentially caught.

Soon I was joined by Peter, tattered, battered and dirty. He was loud and bitter in his lamentations that I had run away from him.

We were now only a stone's throw from the Red Hills, and as we had had enough of Bell for some time to come, we tied her up firmly behind a hedge, in a field, where she could munch the grass to her heart's content; then we set out in search of a quiet, sheltered place where we

might eat our lunch. The bread was in a somewhat dilapidated condition, but we thought ourselves fortunate in having had it so tightly stuffed into our pockets to begin with that little short of a charge of dynamite could have dislodged it.

As we sat there under a tree, dust-begrimed and happy, the strains of a steam organ floated on the still air. In a second we were on the top of a red mound, scanning the country. The flash of polished brass rods in the sunshine and the whirl of flaring red colours in the direction of the village of Nitshill, caught our eyes and told us that a merry-go-round was in full operation over there.

Peter had a ha'penny, and as there was no saying what we might be able to pick up when we got to Nitshill, we started off at a run, forgetting, in the anticipation of new delights, all about poor Bell tethered in the field behind the hedge. And it was not until the evening, when two hungry, tired and dirty little vagabonds, one with the seat of his trousers torn away and the other without his bonnet, were thinking of home, that they remembered with joy there would be no necessity for a weary, three-mile trudge, as Bell would be waiting anxiously for them at the foot of the Red Hills, ready and willing to hurry them and herself back to Pollokshaws.

It never entered our thoughts that it might turn out otherwise, and when we got to the place where Bell had been tethered so securely, consternation and despair snuffed out our spirits as a wet cloth would a spluttering candle. Bell was gone.

We searched for her in every direction, but without success. We were not sufficiently acquainted with donkeys to know what particular kind of call should be used for letting stray ones understand that they were being waited for, but we whistled, and shouted, crying, "Here, here," "Cheety-cheety," "Pruchiledy," and

"Cow-bossy," and we used every other device we could think of for coaxing domestic animals, but with no appreciable result.

At last it was borne in on us that we would have to walk home. That was not the worst of it. There was the load on our minds that we had lost Bell—ten shillings and sixpence worth of donkey, a positive fortune—and with this sense of loss came all the attendant trouble with Jimmy Calligan, with the policeman, and the baillie; then, behind these, the jail and maybe the birch rod. Ours was hardly a comfortable position, and we did not know what was best to do.

We inquired fruitlessly of every person we met on the road if he had seen a donkey without an owner, thus foolishly advertising our connection with the business.

When we neared home it was almost dark. We made up our minds to deny all knowledge of the donkey should anyone question us. We thought, however, that it might be well for us to go down to Calligan's yard and have a peep into Bell's stable, just to assure ourselves that it had not all been a dream and that we really and truly had taken Bell away that morning.

Peter, ever keen and inquisitive, as well as impetuous, pushed into the stable and commenced groping in the dark. He let out a yell, louder and fiercer than the one he had given vent to in the morning, and he joined me limping painfully.

"What's wrong this time?" I inquired, anxiously. "Is she there, Peter?"

"Ay, she's there," he replied, rubbing his leg.

"How do you ken?" I asked, foolishly.

"Fine I ken," said he. "It's no' the first time I've had a kick from her. I ken her kick in a thoosand. But, if you don't believe me, go in yoursel' and find oot."

I took Peter's word for it, and we sliddered home, relieved and happy once more.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I

MANY and crude were the makeshifts we had to resort to and the substitutes we had to put up with for want of the wherewithal to purchase.

If a show came to town, we were ever on the spot, ready to distribute handbills or posters in return for a free admission ticket, and we were not above burying half of the supply if we considered ourselves imposed on in the matter of quantity.

Whenever there was a Sunday-school soirée, we knew the beadle would be ready and anxious to allow one or two of us to slip in without a ticket on the understanding that we helped him to pick up the torn paper bags that had contained the buns and cookies, and to clear away the remains of the feast that lay on the floor to full view after the people went away; and as this admission included a bag of cookies and pastries, with as much tea as one could swill in the space of half-an-hour, and very often a bag of sweeties and an orange thrown in for good measure, Peter and I were sure to be in the forefront as volunteers, sometimes having placed our applications with the said beadle several days before the event in order to prevent any others jumping what we had come to consider our special claim.

During the short skating season, it was strange indeed if we did not manage, in spite of the vigilance of the caretakers who were continually on the prowl, to squeeze through a hole in the high fence which encompassed the skating pond and so enjoy many hours on the rink free of charge; doing the outside edge, the backward glide, and cutting the figure eight, all on a pair of wooden clothes pins tied to the soles of our boots with string.

For years there was not a football match of any importance that took place in the town that we did not witness, and from the best part of the enclosure too. Our system was simple.

We clustered round the entrance to the grounds with our eyes on every person who came to pass through the turnstiles. When we were lucky enough to discover some man with whom we were on the most casual acquaintance, we immediately caught on to his coat tails and passed through the gates along with him, there being an unwritten understanding in those days that a man who paid at the gate had the privilege of taking a youngster in with him without extra charge. There was wisdom in this on the part of the football officials, for they were making plenty of future football supporters in this way.

Occasionally, two of us would grab at the same coat-tails at the same time and a scuffle would ensue for possession, in which the owner of the coat-tails got pulled about considerably. It was then his prerogative to decide which of us should accompany him, and rather than lose the mercenary friendship of one of us, he would generally settle the dispute by a toss of the coin.

We sometimes found, when those men with whom we had a nodding acquaintance arrived, they already had a boy hanging tenaciously and triumphantly to their garments. Rather than take a chance at the gate, the youngster in question had camped on the man's

doorstep from the time he had arrived home from work and had pounced on him the moment he came out of the door on his way to the game. On such occasions, there was nothing left for us to do but to tag on gingerly behind some individual we did not know at all, keeping well in his rear and holding his coat-tail quite lightly, so that he would not know that we were there, but still endeavouring to show sufficient assurance and ease to deceive the gate-keeper, a task requiring considerably more astuteness than we were capable of. I am afraid this extraordinarily shallow little subterfuge was observed more often than not by both the man entering the turnstile and by the gate-keeper. If this was so, they were always good-natured enough to smile, ignore our presence, and thereby pass us through on the nod.

II

I made the astonishing discovery one day that I was the possessor of some wealthy relatives, consisting of a ministerial uncle, a matronly aunt and the usual small fry of cousins. I had not known of their existence until that day, and I have been unaware of their existence since.

They lived (or rather, being toney, resided) in a high class terrace somewhere in the city to the north of us.

It appears that they contemplated moving to another part of the country, and as there would be little likelihood of our recording the invitation as a precedent, my mother and I were asked to call. They had a quantity of rubbish, of no use to themselves but apparently too good to throw away or give in exchange for pipeclay at the door, so, as a more deserving medium of disposition and as a pandering to their conscience that they were doing somebody good, we were considerately thought of.

We were received with great condescension. The size of the rooms, the fancy overmantels, the curtains,

the book-cases, and the soft, easy chairs were too completely beyond me and filled me with vague discomfort. However, my mother had not been insincere enough to prime me beforehand—like one little boy I heard of in similar circumstances—to say, with the correct naïve inflection, "Mother, is this Heaven?"

Instead of a full-fledged dinner, with soup, beef and potatoes, and maybe something else afterwards, which I had conjured up all the way there, we were treated to a hand-round tea, some biscuits and a piece of cake. If there is anything that a hungry boy abhors, especially in the middle of the day, it is a hand-round tea.

It is just possible that I was exhibiting the capacity of my healthy appetite to my aunt's astonishment and to my mother's discomfort, or possibly my mother may have noticed how bored I was becoming with the whole proceedings; anyway, a shrill, squeaky noise from the street below and a voice which shouted clearly, "Here we are again; here we are again," signalled to me that a Punch and Judy show was about to begin. The suggestion of my aunt that I go down to see it met with the instant approval of my mother and the hearty assent of myself.

I followed that show for hours, from street to street, but not at any time too wholly absorbed not to keep an eye on my bearings. It was almost dusk when I arrived back at my aunt's dwelling, when my mother was more than ready to make the journey home again. We were piled up with bundles and boxes, as much as we could inconveniently carry, and let out in the gathering dusk.

I had been informed that one of the boxes was specially for me, and naturally I was in desperation to get home to see inside it. But when I did I found nothing to enthuse over. It contained picture books with tawdry covers and torn leaves, portraying Bible

stories; headless horses with armless horsemen; a few legless highlanders from which the colours on the kilts had been sucked off; squeaking dolls with perforated and silent squeakers; an engine with broken wheels; a burst rubber ball; an incomplete set of tiddly-winks, and a lot of other brainless games designed for the amusement of the jaded city offspring of the higher-up-than-I, but of little or no interest to me. Everything I pulled out of that box seemed dilapidated and in varying stages of senile decay.

III

But I did come across something at last which seemed intact; the only article in the lot which caused me anything approaching excitement. It was a magic lantern.

I at once apprised Peter of the fact. He examined the lantern closely and peered through the various slides with the eyes of a connoisseur, then hinted guardedly to me that there might be money in it. Anything with the possibility of money in it and we were both agog—money was so imaginary a thing with us.

Our lantern experience had been gained chiefly from a spectator's point of view at Band of Hope meetings, watching pictures elaborating on the horrors of choosing a drunken father for a parent and concluding usually with the time-worn, comic-variety of slides depicting a man lying in bed and swallowing rats with evident relish.

Once, it is true, in the absence of the regular assistant, Peter had helped in handing up the slides to the operator as required, and he reckoned ever afterwards to know a little more about the business than I did.

Well, we put our heads together and busied ourselves for two whole afternoons cleaning out our coal-shed, much to the annoyance of my patient mother and to the detriment of the physical features of our back yard. We haunted every grocer's shop in the town for empty

boxes, until the men behind the counters were glad to give us a few to get rid of us.

Our coal shed was only about six feet square, and we experienced some difficulty in arranging the seating accommodation. An old, white table cloth was tacked up against the back wall. At Peter's suggestion, we wet the screen, for he said he knew from experience that lantern pictures showed up better on a wet background.

We pinned notices on stable doors and on garden walls throughout the neighbourhood. These, and some carefully written handbills which we distributed in the playground, announced that a splendid magic lantern entertainment, with real, paraffin-oil lamp and comic slides, would be given on a certain evening at a certain time, that the admission to the front seats was one farthing, back seats, marbles, lead pencils, toffy balls or anything of like value or utility. Slate pencils and pins were barred. The owners of the lantern reserved the right to refuse admission to any individual.

This last clause was put in for very special reasons.

When the great night arrived the rain was coming down in torrents. The coal-shed, unfortunately, was leaking like a colander, creating a perfect puddle-hole underfoot. But, the elements notwithstanding, a noisy, steaming, impatient crowd was clamouring for admission long before the specified time. With the exception of Peter's young sister, Maggie, there were no ladies present, the inclement weather probably accounting for their absence, but more likely the fact that the young ladies of our age in our district would rather have been seen at a dog fight than at our magic lantern show.

Peter remained within the shed adjusting the lantern, while I stood out in the rain, holding the door against the crowd.

"All right," Peter shouted at last.

As I blocked the entrance with my arm, I shouted out:

"Front seats ready. Money only. Money only."

Oh, joy! no less than five plutocrats came forward and presented their farthings. All at once there was a rush from the back of the rain-soaked and bedraggled mob, evidently preconcerted.

"Get back there! Get back!" I screeched excitedly, banging the door at my back hurriedly. The door closed on something soft, which ejaculated a howl and a gurgle as I pressed my weight.

I had shut the door on Peter's neck. He had been spying out to check my count of the farthing admissions, it having been arranged beforehand that we were to go halves on the proceeds.

I relieved the strain and little harm was done to Peter. In a few moments more the five farthings were jingling in my pocket and the affluent spectators were seated on the egg boxes, so close to the front that they could touch the screen with their dirty fingers or their feet, whichever they chose.

When it came to gauging the values of the various articles tendered by the other boys, I was confronted with a greater problem. But as my decision was final, it was useless for any to grumble. I took what I thought best value.

The inside of the coal-shed was soon packed so tightly that there was hardly room enough to suffocate in in comfort, let alone breathe, while a horde of unrulies and discontents still clustered outside, offering pins and slate pencil all unheeding of the notice on the handbills.

It was all I could do to squeeze inside, but I succeeded, and, with a large rusty key, I turned the lock in the door and all was supposed to be in readiness to begin.

An inch and a half of candle spluttered on the end of a jagged brick which jutted from the wall. The lantern was set on the top of three boxes, while Peter was perched precariously behind it, on top of two

more. His head was bumping the roof at his every movement.

As minute after minute passed without anything showing on the screen, there arose an ever-increasing amount of unnecessary remarks and side-squabbling among the audience.

"It's a cheat."

"Give me my three bools back and let me oot."

"Here, get over a bit and let me get the room I paid for."

"Hurry up and screw on your auld magic lantern."

"Who are ye shoving?"

"Open the door and let oot the smell; it never paid to get in onyway."

I could feel as well as hear that growing uneasiness.

"Here, give me my money back," cried one of the front-benchers.

That caused things to assume a serious aspect in my mind. I stretched up to Peter in great anxiety.

"Can I help you a wee bit?"

"No, it's gettin' on fine. Silence everybody. You'll all see a camel on the screen in a minute. No, it's no' a camel; it's Elijah in the den o' lions at the Polytechnic—no, at the Coliseum.

"Here, you, McGuigan," he shouted, "sit doon and keep your head oot o' the light."

Peter kept working quite cool and businesslike.

Something went wrong with the wick of the oil lamp in the lantern and it began to smell abominably. But Peter took it in hand promptly.

"We came a day too soon," remarked another of the audience.

"If I kent who said that, Jimmy McTavish," cried Peter angrily, "I would knock his nose in."

The ventilation of the coal-shed was decidedly bad. To say truth, there was none. A horrible odour invaded the place, consisting as it did of damp clothes over none-

too-clean bodies, carbonised air, paraffin oil, smoky wick, oranges, and the natural mustiness which belongs to every coal-shed that happens to be used half the time as a garbage receptacle.

Only once since have I experienced so strangling a sensation, and that was many years later when I found it necessary one rainy evening, in the course of business, to go into a ten by twelve feet shack in Western Canada in which some twenty Hindus lodged. The door and the windows had been closed all day, a noisome mess was being cooked on the stove, wet garments hung around everywhere, several of the inmates were washing their shirts, others were washing their feet, and a few were lying in bunks in the last stages of intoxication.

When it looked as if a riot would end the entertainment in the coal-shed, Peter gave a cry of triumph, reached out and snuffed the candle. A faint circle of light shed itself upon the screen. It was as sickly and wavering as the expiring Tinkerbell in "Peter Pan," but it sufficed to quiet the noise. And when someone ventured the belief that it was coming, it gradually grew brighter.

"Weesht! Nobody say a word. It's comin'!" admonished Peter.

He inserted a slide. The white light changed and several colours flashed out. Through the medley, the head of an elephant loomed up quite distinctly.

A cheer broke out from the audience, creating a stir among those outside and causing them to renew their kicking and battering at the door for admission.

"Picture of a wild elephant that feeds on naked savages in the African jungle," enlightened Peter.

Then he threw several other pictures on the screen with lightning rapidity, in desperation to make the most of the shining moment. Some of the pictures were partly discernible; others were not even that.

In the midst of the entertainment and without any warning, the light in the lantern went out and left us in inky darkness. The unrest loosed itself once more in wild, discordant sounds, while high above the commotion the valiant Peter could be heard threatening bodily chastisement to all who did not have patience until he got a fresh light.

But he could not lay his hands on the matches, high or low. He appealed to me for help. At last I unearthed them, or rather, unwatered them, from the mud and slush on the floor, trampled on and quite useless.

The humid atmosphere was beginning to tell on even the most hardened of us, and when two of the boys in the orchestral stalls started a fight, a rough house was precipitated.

Someone remonstrated in a loud voice, "Here, you're trampin' on my chilblains." He was violently pushed against those behind him. The backward movement travelled. Someone crashed against Peter; the boxes staggered and toppled, Peter shouted out a warning, then he and the lantern fell over on top of us.

All was pitchy dark. The scuffling, and tramping, and pushing could only have been equalled by a herd of cattle in a Dublin boat on a rough night. I reached for the key, but it had got dislodged from the key-hole. As word went round of this fresh calamity, a panic ran riot, for only that day at school had we been reading about the Black Hole of Calcutta. The seriousness of our position sobered us down, and just as we were all beginning to resign ourselves to a horrible death, a tremendous crash splintered the door in on us. We cowered for a moment, then poured out in a heap into the lane, gasping and spluttering. Our cries had attracted some of our elders, and a next-door neighbour had smashed in the door with an axe.

We were none the worse for our exploit; only dirty and perspiry.

Peter pulled me aside from the crowd to the lamp-post at the corner.

"Have you got the money?" he asked, in great concern.

"Ay," I replied, jingling it.

"And the bools, and the knife, and the pencil case, and the peerie, and the stalk o' rock, and the other things?" he went on. He knew every item.

"I—I lost the stalk o' rock in the dark, Peter," I confessed, "but I have all the rest."

"It's dashed funny aboot the stalk o' rock, but if you have everything else, it's no' so bad. We'll half them up later on."

Peter looked fidgety and excited.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Did you see that big, fat lump, McGuigan? I'm goin' to knock his head in. We shouldna have let him in, onyway. And we wouldna either, if he hadna had the money."

McGuigan was a slack, podgy, witless creature, considerably older than any of us. He worked in the afternoons hawking fish from a barrow, and was always brave and bellicose when dealing with boys smaller and younger than himself, who tolerated and toadied to him because he was seldom without a few coppers to spend.

Peter was almost as tall as he, but the two were as little alike as a ball of wool and a darning needle.

"See oor wee Maggie there?" Peter continued. "She's greetin' yet. McGuigan knocked her into a corner in the dark, he banged her head against the wall and stuck his finger in her e'e. But he'll get mair than he's looking for when I catch him."

We searched diligently for McGuigan, but he was nowhere to be seen; and Peter had perforce to nurse his righteous wrath.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I

ALL that week Peter infested the highways and by-ways, looking for this creature who had insulted his wee sister Maggie: a most unusual thing for him, for at that time Peter was of the rattle-brain variety that received a message in one ear and immediately let it out at the other, that forgot both good turn and injury an hour after its performance.

McGuigan, with his grosser build, his advantage of years and his knowledge of the business world, had always lorded it over the boys in our district, and we feared his prestige and his violence not a little. But some notion seemed to have incubated at the back of Peter's head that he could beat McGuigan in a fair fight. It was really this, more than the injury to Maggie, that kept the insult alive in his heart, and he was on nettles to try out his growing conviction.

One afternoon, as we were engaged splashing stones into a puddle and trying to run back out of the way of the flying mud we created, a distant, sing-song cry broke into the calm of our harmless amusement.

"Herring. Caller Herring. Bawbee the piece; three a penny."

Peter was on the alert like a deer and off at a jump.

"McGuigan," he yelled. "Come on."

Nothing loath, I followed the flying heels of my companion, and round the corner we came full tilt upon McGuigan and his fish barrow, just as he was attending to some good housewife with a pennyworth of his "three-a-penny" herrings.

Peter ran in between McGuigan and the lady who was being supplied.

"What did ye shove oor wee Maggie for?" he asked, aggressively, and just as if the affair had happened a moment before.

McGuigan pushed Peter aside in a brusque, business-like way, and, with a backward movement, he splashed a wet, slimy herring full in Peter's face.

"Can you no' see I'm servin' a wummin?" he queried, angrily, "an' I hae nae time to be bothered wi' ye."

Peter was furious, and would have flown at McGuigan there and then had not Sergeant Cauldfingers, of the police, swung round the gable-end of a building.

"Awa' ye go," went on McGuigan, loud enough for the sergeant to hear. "Hoo do ye think I can fight ye when I'm wi' the herring barrow? If ye want hauf-kilt, I'll see ye on the Knowe at six o'clock the nicht."

That was good enough heartening for Peter. Everything having been arranged satisfactorily and the muddy and prostrate herring wiped and replaced by McGuigan on his barrow, we left that individual to the disposition of his perishable wares, as his voice rang out again:

"Herring. Caller herring. Bawbee the piece; three a penny."

This fresh insult of the none-too-fresh herring fanned the fires of Peter's anger and made him fidgety and anxious during all the remainder of the afternoon. It was quite a relief when we set out in the early evening for the battle ground.

McGuigan was there already, incased by a knot of little ragamuffins from his own end of the town. They came on to the flat part of the hill to meet us.

Peter went up close to McGuigan, and the usual preliminary argument ensued.

"What did you shove oor wee Maggie for?"

"Why did you interfere wi' me when I was servin' a customer?"

"Because you shoved oor wee Maggie."

"I never shoved her. She came up against me and stotted off."

"You did so shove her."

"Weel, and did I no' pay my good money to get in to see your cheatery magic-lantern?" went on McGuigan, coming up aggressively close, all the while smelling vilely of his calling.

"You never payed to get shoving my wee sister and sticking your finger in her e'e."

"Noo, that's a big lie. I never did stick my finger in her e'e. Did I, Wullie? You were there." He appealed excitedly to one of his henchmen.

"No, you never did," said the one addressed, adding quickly, "Knock his head in, McGuigan."

"What do you know aboot it," asked Peter, turning to this interloper. "Even if you were there, hoo could you see what he did in the dark?"

"Fine. He never stuck his finger in her e'e, for it was my e'e he stuck it in; so there."

This was too small potatoes for Peter. He went up once more to McGuigan, with tightly clenched fists, determined on having some value for all his trouble. "Are you goin' to fight, or are ye no'?"

"Of coorse I'm goin' to fight," answered McGuigan. "What do ye think I came here for? To say it was a fine day?

"Here, Wullie," he went on, "hold that," tossing

his cap to his second. He next peeled off his ragged jacket. As he did so the odour of fish cloyed the air, attracting a swarm of expectant flies, which buzzed and sang in a cloud over his head.

"Hold that, Tam." He threw his jacket to another of his friends.

He then took off his muffler, wiped his nose with it and tied it about his waist, or rather, his middle. With the slow and calm deliberation of a butcher, he rolled up his sleeves.

McGuigan was almost too dirty to touch; too dirty to be going with a garbage cart, let alone with a herring barrow. Fish scales were sticking tenaciously to every part of him. Even Peter felt chary about tackling the job in front of him, and Peter was no æsthete.

"Come on," he cried, impatiently squaring up. "You're just wastin' time, McGuigan."

At a glance I could see that McGuigan's courage was leaving him with every garment he discarded. But he answered Peter's challenge bravely, swaying and feinting, and shuffling around like a negro sand-dancer.

Peter's fist shot out. Phew! what a mess it made. It was just as if his fist had splattered into a basketful of strawberries.

He followed this up with another blow, and McGuigan turned to flee. But the circle of his supporters hemmed him in, preventing his projected flight. He wiped the blood from his nose and eyes with the back of his hand, spreading it over his face like jelly on a slice of bread.

"Here, where's my bonnet?" he cried excitedly. "Somebody's stole my bonnet."

"I ha'e it, Jock; it's a' richt," answered one of the crowd much too quickly for McGuigan's comfort.

"Where's my coat, then? Who's got my jacket?" he whimpered.

"It's here," shouted another. "Surely you're no' beat already, Jock?"

"No, I'm no' beat," spluttered McGuigan, with a faint glow of bravado, as he hitched up his voluminous trousers, "but I don't want to lose ony o' my claes."

"Who's got my muffler?" he continued, in anxiety, with an eye on Peter and a shuffling away all the time.

No one replied this time.

"Who's got my muffler, I'm asking?" he went on, almost crying in his would-be perturbation. "It's a new yin; I paid one and sixpence for it last Saturday."

It was evident, even to McGuigan's staunchest supporters, that he was just stalling for time.

"Your muffler's round your waist," remarked Wullie, his second.

"It's no'," answered McGuigan.

"But it is. Look for yoursel'," cried Wullie again.

"You're telling a lee. It's no' there."

McGuigan was ready to quarrel about anything with anybody—anybody but Peter. He threatened me, but I had him sized up by this time, so a small display of boldness on my part put an end to it so far as I was concerned.

Peter stepped up again. McGuigan threw up his arms blindly to guard himself from the blow before it came. And when his hands were in the air, the blow went home. And the "shover of maidens," the "bumper of feminine heads against walls," the "poker of fingers in ladies' eyes," tottered backward and flopped on the grass, his arms and legs stretched out, beaten to a frazzle, without having struck a single blow in his own defence.

It was an inglorious ending to McGuigan's career as a fighter, and a glorious tribute to the prowess of Peter

—raw, lanky, happy-go-lucky rickle of bones that he always was.

We stayed alongside until McGuigan showed signs of recovery. When we left, he was wobbling but on his feet, and engaged in a half-hearted dispute with his backers over a "tanner" which he alleged one of them had taken out of his trouser pocket when he was lying helpless and "oot o' his senses."

"My," remarked Peter philosophically, as we sauntered back down the hill, "it's a gey queer thing, but every time I fight when I'm in the wrang, I get the worst o' it; and every time I fight when I'm in the richt, I win wi' the least o' ease. And that's the first time I ever won a fight in my life."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I

THAT fight with McGuigan was only one of the many in which Peter and I became involved. Week in and week out, some fresh disturbance broke into our innocent lives, necessitating our fighting for our very existence, because one exposure of the white feather meant no end of bullying and tyranny for him who showed it.

We were usually in the thick of all the games and exploits which originated in our neighbourhood; but there were times when we kept just a little aloof, just a little bit apart. We were in the fun for all we could get out of it; we were in the crowd yet we were not altogether of it. It may have been the training in our homes that accounted for this (Peter's father was a stern, unbending, yet lovable old pillar of the kirk; my mother was a quiet, anxious, God-fearing woman). It may have been ambition. No doubt a little of both, for proper training and good influence are the natural creators of ambition. Anyway, the longing was with us to get away from the others, away out among the woods, over the fields, along the burn-sides and the unfrequented roads; a longing to talk and to listen, undisturbed.

God knows what we got to talk about and heaven alone has the record, but we found pleasure, and comfort, and health in our eccentricity that were not to be found

in the cobbled streets along with a gang of shouting urchins. We ventured into many by-paths of thought that otherwise we would have passed unnoticed or shunned in the fear of that boys' bugbear, ridicule.

For this peculiarity of ours, we were dubbed "stuck-up" and "high-minded," and not once, but many times, as we endeavoured to slip away by ourselves, we had to undergo a fusillade of rude remarks from the crowd of boys generally gathered at the Round Toll. As a rule, we forebore retaliation. But juvenile forbearance is not of the long-suffering kind. We had a certain position to maintain on the ladder of life, a position which at that period of our existence was held solely by physical force and subtlety, a position which was continually assailed by those reaching upward from the rungs below, a position which we in turn strove to better as we grew in strength and strategy, dislodging and casting aside whenever we could all who barred the way of our progress. So, when the taunts and jibes of our fellows struck home a little too deep, there was either a hasty retreat on the part of the shouter, or a challenge and a sharp encounter.

There was one boy in that crowd whom we named "The Dishcloot"; a sneaky, creepy customer, ever ready with his tongue if the way of retreat was open, but abject in his apologies and explanations and slow to show fight if cornered.

"The Dishcloot" was a source of great worry to me with his yelling of names and his clod throwing. A hundred times have I chased him in a positive itch to push my fists into him. I was fleet of foot, and when I started off in pursuit I was usually pretty sure of catching up with him, but for many a long day this availed me little, for the moment I got within striking distance he would lie down and moan and groan as if he had already been half-killed.

We had a certain code of honour by which we considered it cowardly to hit a *man* when he was down, and if ever temper overcame good judgment in this respect, the rule was enforced by the spectators stepping in between the combatants and shouting, "Let him up. Let him up."

This was the stringent though unwritten law behind which "The Dishcloot" sheltered himself. By no means of persuasion or coercion could he be induced to rise: he knew where he was safe. Generally in the end I had to leave him, with disgust showing in my face and sarcasm rolling from my tongue, as he lay grovelling in the dirt, encircled by his derisive and scornful friends, who were all well aware of his cowardly but crafty dodge for evading the drubbing he so richly merited. They did not seek to disguise the pleasure it gave them to witness my dilemma in the handling of the problem.

This unsatisfactory state of matters went on for a longer time than I care to think about. But one day Peter and I passed the corner, bent on our usual stroll. It was one of those rare occasions on which we happened to be wearing nice, white collars. From the corners of our eyes we could notice quite a flutter of excitement among the crowd as we passed, and we had our suspicions. We were only a few yards on our way when the yell, "Half-biled toffs. Half-biled toffs," was raised.

Peter wisely paid no heed. I turned round, hoping that a flash from my fiery eye would quell the insurrection, but it proved a most unfortunate hazard. A bad egg from "The Dishcloot's" hand smote me between the exposed part of my neck and my white collar. My rage surged and overflowed. So did that egg. "The Dishcloot" made off. I followed in hot pursuit.

Peter took in the trouble at a glance and shot down a side lane, past half a dozen garbage places—middens,

we called them—and through several more, in the hope of intercepting the common enemy.

I did not know of this ruse of Peter's until afterwards, and I chased on after "The Dishcloot." I was almost within reach of him, and he was gathering himself for his usual flop on the ground, when Peter dashed out at the opening of the lane, caught him under the armpits before he could fall, and bolstered him up from behind.

It was a master-stroke.

"Hit him. Hit him," cried Peter excitedly, his arms around the struggling, kicking Dishcloot with the hug of a bear.

I did hit him. I hit him hard and I hit him often.

Then there was a commotion round the corner as the hounds came on, full cry, shouting, "Let him up. Let him up." "The Dishcloot's" puffing companions pattered down on us, anticipating the usual scene. They were taken aback at what they witnessed.

"Ay, we'll let him up; we'll even haud him up," cried Peter, sarcastically, "but we'll tak' good care we don't let him doon."

"Hit him on the mouth. Hit him on the mouth," he yelled to me; "'The Dishcloot' has got broken teeth."

Now, that was the touch of a genius. But Peter always was an artist.

I followed out his instructions to a letter, for I had many months' old scores to wipe out.

At last, when we thought "The Dishcloot" had had as much as he could stand, Peter released him, and we let him sit. He flopped down limply, and his anxiety for the rest and security which the solid earth afforded was as real as it was apparent.

II

Although I was seldom annoyed after that by "The Dishcloot," it looked as if he had transferred his rights

in me to a bosom friend of his of the name of Josie, and a new performance had to be gone through, again and again, before this fresh annoyance was reduced to a state of proper subjection.

Josie could run almost as fast as I could, and he could duck, and dodge, and double more quickly, with the result that he would run and I would pursue, down streets, through closes, up lanes, in one ashpit and out at another, over fences and through gardens, finishing up, almost invariably, within a stone's throw of where we started, whirling round and round the old circular, iron fountain in the Jubilee Square, first one way and then the other, he excited and a little afraid, I angry and anxious; to the merriment of everybody but ourselves; until he became too exhausted to go another step and stood helpless as I staggered up to him.

By this time I would be so done that I would not have the strength to raise my arms above my head let alone strike an effective blow in the cause of justice, and we would stand there and puff and blow in each other's face, in sheer helplessness.

All my anger would depart at the humour of the situation, and ultimately the two of us would walk back to our different chums, with honour satisfied and to all appearances on the best of terms.

Once, however, Josie overstepped the mark and my righteous indignation lent greater speed to my feet than ever before. He hit me on the forehead with a stone, and before I could get my hand up to the place there was a lump there as big as a little suet pudding.

Josie was off like a pebble from a catapult, and I after him. I gained at every step. He ducked and dodged once, and I caught him. But his tattered coat ripped in my hand and he sped on. He must have known he was in deadly danger. He turned down a lane. I followed. He wheeled into a lobby, raised

the sneck of a door and darted in, trying his hardest to bang the door back in my face. But I was too quick for him.

I did not know exactly where we were or whose house it was with which we were taking so much liberty. I did not think; I did not care; I just wanted to get my hands on Josie.

I got him down on the kitchen floor and we rolled over and over, fighting and snarling like the young pups we were. I got on top of him and pummelled him until I grew weary. He yelled and kicked. It was only then that I discovered we were not alone in the house.

The doors of the concealed bed in the kitchen flew partly open and a great, white apparition arose. It had tremendous bare feet, with the largest and horniest-looking toenails on them I had ever seen. It had blinking eyes and a week's growth of whisker on its chin.

"Whit's this? Whit's this?" it asked, testily, stepping over the kitchen table and onto the business-end of a fork, with a muttered swear-word, jumping quickly onto the floor.

"Twa brats fechtin'—and richt in a man's ain hoose."

It was Josie's father. He was a watchman on the night-shift, and consequently was compelled to don his night-shirt during the day.

We got up from the floor.

"Whit are ye doin' here?" he went on, addressing me. "Get oot an' be quick aboot it, ye interlopin' young blackguard. Get oot or I'll set the polis on ye. Fechtin' richt in a man's ain hoose, when a body's sleepin' in his ain bed. I never heard tell o' the like o' it afore."

"He flung a stone at me," I explained. "Look at the lump on my brow."

Josie's father took up his spectacles from the kitchen table and thrust them on his nose, then he caught me by the shoulder and marched me over to the open window, pushing back my hair and examining the lump on my forehead over his glasses.

"Ay, ay," he mused, seriously. "Might ha'e kilt ye." After a momentary pause, he went on. "Sit doon on that stool there, and watch."

I obeyed in fear and trembling.

"You young blackguard! You young blackguard!" he repeated in a sort of soliloquy, "I promised ye a lickin' this mornin' for breakin' the beer-jug when it was fu' tae the brim. Ye'll get the double dose noo, my man."

I was uncertain for a time whether he meant me or Josie, but his reference to the beer-jug, and the woe-begone look on Josie's face, cleared up the point. The man in the night-shirt went to the smoke-board at the fireplace and took down a big strap which hung there, evidently in a state of constant readiness, just like the harness over the fire brigade horses.

"Josie," he shouted, "tak' doon your breeks."

Josie began to blubber. "Naw, naw, faither. I'll no' do it again, as sure as daith," he cried.

"Do ye want three lickin's instead o' twa? Tak' doon your breeks this meenute and don't be wastin' my time. I should be sleepin' in my bed getting strength for my nicht's work."

Josie obeyed, and I became a most uncomfortable spectator for a while, until I began to fancy that I would be safer outside. The window was open, so I slipped over it on to the ground, crouching down on the outside and peering in, enjoying the scene now with great relish as the yelling and the whacking still continued.

Suddenly, without raising his head from Josie, the man in the night-shirt shouted to where he supposed

I was sitting, "Here, you; it's your turn next. I'm no' makin' fish o' yin and flesh o' the ither. Tak' doon your breeks, and be quick aboot it, or it'll be the worse for ye——"

He was saying something more, but I did not wait to hear it. I was away as fast as my agile little legs could carry me.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I

ANY reading I had done up to this time was of a very desultory order, consisting as it did of extracts from *Drummond's Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, some illustrated stories of Biblical lore, a book called *Sandford and Merton*, stray gleanings from a few back-dated *Quivers* and *The Girls' Own Paper*, all of which had found their way into our home; stuff to me as dry as mummy dust, and only a little better than nothing at all on a pouring wet Sunday afternoon.

This literature did not tend to instil in me any great love for reading, in fact I had a very poor opinion of any boy who had the perverted taste to take pleasure in such an apparently uninteresting pastime.

I was more than astonished one day to come upon Peter in a corner of the school playground, sitting with his back against a wall and oblivious of the shrieking youngsters around him devouring a paper-covered book as if his very life depended on it. I went up to him and sat down by his side.

"What's that you're reading?" I asked.

He did not answer; he did not even raise his head. I pushed his book and repeated my question. The book fell from his hand to the ground. He grabbed it up hungrily and looked at me with some show of annoyance.

"Don't!" he grunted. "Jings, it's great! It's a blood."

I tried him with a few more questions, but I could not rouse him.

I looked for the blood he had mentioned, but I failed to see any. I began to think there must be something wrong with Peter, but I waited patiently, as he seemed to be nearing the end. At length he heaved a great sigh and the air rushed out of him as it would from a burst balloon.

"Jings," he exclaimed, "but that was clinkin'."

I asked him for enlightenment, and he smiled at me pityingly.

"It's a blood," he explained again, "a tu'penny blood."

"Is it a story?" I asked, innocently, for up to this time I had no notion of the existence of such soul-satisfying entertainers.

"Of coorse," he went on, "aboot Indians, and savages, and wild beasts, and murders, and scalpin', and machinery, and shootin', and revolvers. It's great."

"Is there nothin' in it aboot 'The Lost Sheep' or 'The Prodigal Son'?" I asked, still sceptical.

"No' a thing; that's the best o' it. It's a' new," said the innocently sacrilegious Peter. "There's no Bible in it, nor no poetry—just the excitin' story a' the time."

This was indeed agreeable news to me.

"How do you get them, Peter?" I asked, in deep interest. "Could you lend me it?"

"Lend you it? Naw! You can't get them unless you join the club," he confided. "There's aboot eight o' us pay a ha'penny a week. We buy two books and we get a day each to read them. That means two tu'penny bloods for a ha'penny. Ay—and sometimes a whole lot mair," he added slyly, with a knowing wink and a screwing up of one side of his mouth.

"If you have a ha'penny and want to join, come on doon to Girnie McGruchie's at dinner-time."

I scrambled up the necessary ha'penny and hurried down to the little paper-shop at the Town's House. A crowd of boys was already collected round the window, their noses rubbing against the pane, gloating over the blood-curdling pictures on the front covers of the tempting spread.

At this late date, it occurs to me that these multi-coloured covers were the birth of the jacket which now adorns our modern novel.

The boys who had foregathered there were all a little older and considerably bigger than I. They comprised the most daring, the most turbulent and the most belligerent in the school, besides being far and away the best fighters and the cleverest footballers. Evidently they were waiting for me to complete the pool.

"Here," cried Peter, when I got up to them, "give your money to Jim. He's going to do the talking."

I handed over my ha'penny.

"Noo," instructed Peter, "don't you say a thing when you're inside. Just watch. And run if you see us running."

I wondered what all the excitement was about and why there should be any necessity for running.

Jim, a bold, bullet-headed, iron-nerved, loud-spoken individual, turned the handle of the door and pushed his way in. We followed close on his heels. A bell tinkled loudly, warning the occupant of the back room that there was a customer in the shop.

Old McGruchie—lame, thrawn and cantankerous from rheumatics—hobbled out. He became fussy and ill-tempered when he saw his shop so filled.

"A dozen o' ye in for a ha'penny's worth of sweeties, I suppose. There's far too many o' you young deevils

in here. Hoo do ye expect me to be able to watch the lot o' ye? I'm no' dootin' but what you're honest enough when you're weel watched; but last week, efter you went oot, there were four o' the very latest tu'penny stories went as weel and they werena paid for.

"Mind ye, I'm no' sayin' ony o' you took them; I'm just sayin' they were here before ye came in and they werena here efter you went awa'."

Jim rapped on the only part of the counter that was not covered with cheap literature.

"We pay for what we get, Girnie—er—Mr. McGruchie. I have fourpence to spend. If you don't want oor custom, tell us. There's a shop in Wilson Street that'll be glad to get it."

This threat to patronise McGruchie's competitor brought the old man to immediate book.

"Och, come in, the whole jing-bang o' ye," he wheezed, rubbing his bony knuckles into his bleary eyes. "I'm kind o' short i' the temper the day wi' the rheumatics."

McGruchie's place was littered with cheap reading material; novelettes, comic journals, sporting papers, and penny and tu'penny "horribles" lay in a medley of profusion and confusion.

We wandered all over the shop, taking up a book here and another there, and passing them round for inspection and comment. How many were picked up during the course of the few minutes we were there, not all the lynx-eyed detectives from Vidocq to Sherlock Holmes could have discovered; and it would have been almost, although not quite, as difficult to have told how many were laid down again.

Finally, a short-leet was made of a number of books, and two, which at a casual glance seemed to fill the necessary requisites by slithering in gore, were picked

out. Girnie McGruchie was paid by Jim in eight ha'pennies and we departed.

As soon as we were safely round the corner, Jim turned to the others. "How many have we got?" he asked.

"I've got two," cried one. "Three," chuckled another. "One," shouted a third.

"None," said Peter, "for I was too busy keepin' Girnie's attention off you fellows by talking to him aboot the rheumatics my faither has on the back o' his hands."

In all, there were some eight books to show for our fourpence and the nerve that had gone with it.

It did not seem to enter the minds of any of us that there was anything wrong in this method of procuring the literature. McGruchie was a miserable kind of old man. He was reputed to be worth lots of money. It gave us rather a saintly feeling to know that we had successfully "done" so crafty an old rascal as McGruchie; although the only real sensation we experienced was the natural excitement associated with the slipping of a book up a jersey or down a trouser leg without being found out.

This was in the days when the *Deadwood Dick* variety of dreadful had already lost its popularity, when the *Buffalo Bills* were *in extremis*, when ventures were being made into the realms of science. A series of books depicting the adventures of an inventive genius called Frank Reade was all the rage. It was *Frank Reade's Steam Man*, *Frank Reade's Railless Train*, *Frank Reade's Armoured Car Among the Cannibals*, Frank Reade's this and Frank Reade's that. Every few days some new thriller, with the immortal Frank Reade as the hero, would come out. These were what we steeped ourselves in for several months at the rate of four or five a week.

What heroes those heroes were! No half-measures

about them. What heart-thumps they gave us with each fresh page we turned! What visions they opened up to us of worlds unexplored, worlds never even dreamed of by one whose reading had been confined to the old type of Sunday magazine!

It is a customary thing to slate the "Penny Dreadful," and for elders to appear horror-stricken when they hear that a boy has become so depraved as to read the trash, but, slovenly written and vicious as they may be, I still raise my hat to them. They were all I could get in those days, and they gave me a taste for reading several years earlier than would have been the case otherwise. Prior to their coming within my ken, I placed all reading matter on the same plane, and I considered the boy who indulged in it on the same level as his effeminate brother who played the piano, knitted stockings, did crochetwork, and took his little sister out in her perambulator.

I cannot find that the "dreadful" ever did me any harm. It might have done so had I remained manacled to it, but then that is hardly the way with literature. We grow and mature as we speed along her sunny roads, whether it be in reading or writing. What we clouded our brows to understand yesterday is clear to us to-day, while to-morrow we may consider it childish in its very simplicity. What pleased us so recently, bores us now, and in the near future we may treat it with open antagonism.

Of the eight little boys who clubbed their ha'pennies in the cause of literature, only one now remains in the land of his birth. One serves his country in India, one is in Africa, another in New Zealand, one swelters in the tropics, while the fields of Flanders account for two more, and the other, as he stands on the verandah of his little bungalow, can watch the broad, brown, salmon-laden Fraser river as it rolls lazily along its

many arms and mingles its fresh waters with the salt of the great Pacific: each of the little band that remains striving to play the man at his Empire's outposts, striving for himself and his dependents, and, in the striving, making the way easier for the generations that must follow on.

II

The progress of our literary studies was accelerated by a discovery which our teacher made shortly after the summer holidays.

One of our numbers fell in arrears with his reading. The "blood and thunder" that he had was one of Frank Reade's very latest, and brimful of sensation. He was due to give it up to Peter at four o'clock in the afternoon, read or unread, and when the bell rang at the end of the dinner-hour, he still had some thirty pages undigested. He asked Peter for an extension of time, but Peter positively refused to grant the request. As the boy was determined on finishing it in one way or another, he resorted to the trick of jamming the book between his knee and the shelf under his desk, stealing a furtive glance at it every minute the teacher's back was turned.

Either the story became more and more interesting toward the end, or the reader grew more careless as he proceeded; at any rate the teacher was standing at his back, looking over his shoulder, and the class was quiet as a graveyard at midnight, on a windless, moonless Hallowe'en, before he glanced up and discovered that something unusual was about to happen.

With an inscrutable look, the teacher held out his hand for the book. He did not say a word, but as he slowly turned over the pages of the poor little "dreadful," he pointed the culprit to the floor. Then, with a disgusted exclamation, he crumpled the paper thing in his hand and started off on a ten-minute lecture on the

baneful effect on the young mind of such trashy, obscene spumings from a degraded and mercenary press. When he concluded he put the crushed thing on the hearth-stone and struck a light.

"Please—please, sir, don't do that," cried the boy at his side in an agonised tone. "I'm the only one that has read it. And—and—and, it's no' mine."

"O-ho! indeed!" exclaimed the teacher with a wise nod of his head. "So it isn't yours? And whose may it be, pray?"

He quickly changed from banter to brusqueness.

"Come on. Hurry up. Whose book is this?"

"Please, sir, I'm no' going to tell."

"And what if I thrash you till you do tell?" asked the teacher.

The boy did not reply. But the strap spoke for a moment or two.

"Now will you tell who owns that book?" asked the teacher again.

"No, I'll no' tell; I'll no' be a coo-ard," answered the faithful wee fellow, with tears in his eyes.

I do not think this punishment would have gone on indefinitely, for our teacher was kind-hearted as male teachers went with scholars in those days, and he was considered a gentleman. But, oh, what a lack of understanding of the youngster to thrash him at all.

The chances are our teacher would have found some other way to discover the owner. But without any warning Peter uncoiled his long legs from round the iron supports of his seat and scrambled up.

"Please, sir, it's mine," he volunteered.

Peter was ordered to the floor.

Then Jim stood up from another part of the room. "Please, sir, it's mine," he cried.

One after another we got up and claimed the miserable book, until the teacher was in a state of complete

bewilderment. There was silence for a bit, then, when no other claimants arose, he asked, "Are there any more liars in the class?"

"No, sir; this is the crowd," ventured the imperturbable Jim, creating a burst of merriment in which the teacher found it hard to refrain from joining.

"What does all this mean, sir?" he asked of Jim. "Explain. You seem to have the most to say."

"Please, sir, it belongs to the eight of us. We spliced for it."

Our inquisitor tried to make believe he did not understand the meaning of the vulgarism, "spliced." Jim enlightened him, then the entire gang was ordered to toe the line on the floor.

"Now, I wish every book of this nature that you boys have in your possession. An organised circulating library, and of such low-rate fiction! What a scandal!" he went on, apparently greatly shocked, although I know now that he had read hundreds of them himself in his own boyhood days, and what's more, that his son read them a generation later.

Seven books were reluctantly given up. These were piled by the teacher on the hearth beside their lonely neighbour. A light was applied and soon they were blazing brightly before eight very dejected and solemn-faced boys.

'I mean to take strong measures for the suppression of this vile taste in literature," he said, sternly, as he ordered us back to our seats. He did not tell us what form these stern measures would take. But the word, stern, carried enough suggestion with it to keep us from feeling comfortable.

III

That evening, the school janitor left a note at each of our homes informing our parents of our goings-on.

The first I knew of it was when it was getting dark and I went indoors, tired and ready for bed.

My sisters had already retired for the night, or were not yet in. My mother was alone, seated by the kitchen fireside, with her spectacles on, reading. That was nothing out of the ordinary. She was very fond of reading, her habit being to take the Bible, start at the first chapter of Genesis and go right through to the last chapter of Revelation, missing nothing, not even that chapter devoted to the begetting of the entire Israelitish tribes. She never seemed to weary of it. When she finished, she started at the beginning again, as deeply interested as ever.

But she was not reading the Bible this night. That was the unusual thing that struck me. As I got nearer to her, my heart jumped. Of all the things, she was poring over one of the very latest bloodcurdlers, *Frank Reade's Iron Horse*.

She looked across at me with a whimsical expression in her eyes. I sat down on the fender at her feet.

"Laddie," she started, "I had a letter from your teacher. He says that you are reading bad books. It was a shock to me and it gave me a sore heart for a while."

I was ashamed, and my eyes kept to the rag mat on the floor.

"I never read one of these before in all my life, and I couldn't say much aboot them excepting what I had heard, so I just went doon the street and bought one, so that I could judge for mysel'. The man in the shop looked at me as if I had gone clean daft, but I didna mind that. So I've been reading this, when I should be reading a better book."

"Is it so very wrong?" I asked, in some concern.

"Oh, it's no' so very bad," she answered, much to my relief. "Just a lot o' silly stuff made to sell, and not

very well put together. But I don't want my laddie to read any more o' them. Will you give me your promise that you won't?"

I gave it readily enough, for my mother never was hard on me—she did not know how to be hard on anyone—and, besides, she and I were chums.

"I met Peter's father," she continued. "I never saw him so angry before. He had made up his mind to lick Peter as hard as he had ever lickit him; but I set him off the notion. I told him I kent a better way than that. He said he would take my advice, and he is doing for Peter what I am doing for you."

She took a card from the mantel-piece and handed it to me.

"There is a ticket with your name on it. It cost me a shilling that I could ill afford, but I know you'll make good use o' it. It makes you a member o' the library doon by, with its thousands of books; books for laddies aboot Indians and machinery and brave men; books for lassies; books for men and women; every kind o' book that you can think o'. And you only have to pay a ha'penny a week for the loan o' any book you want. If you can afford a ha'penny a week for this kind, you can easily afford it for a book with good, honest, solid-looking pasteboard covers on it."

Peter and I were a proud pair as we went striding into the library the next evening with our membership cards in our hands. We perused the thick catalogues in search of the wildest, woolliest tales of adventure we could find. And we found them, lots of them. Peter's first choice was George Manville Fenn's *First in the Field;* mine was *Robbery Under Arms* by Rolf Bolderwood.

During our second week as members, we learned to play the old game of exchange, although the rules expressly disallowed it, and thus we had two books to read every week for our weekly ha'penny.

Ballantyne, Henty, Marryat, Jules Verne, Captain Mayne Reid, Stevenson—Peter and I climbed the heights together.

Frank Reade, with all his inventions, his innovations and his hair-breadth, hair-raising and hair-losing escapades, became lost to us for all time. But, for all that, it was he who set us out on our long, literary journey.

How I used to turn cold at the thought of what I should do after I had run through all the good books in the world! It made me read slowly, so that they would last out longer. But it is many years now since I got over that feeling. I am still on the long journey. Every mountain-peak of thought which I surmount shows me another, and a higher, and a grander mount away ahead; and the ever-increasing sorrow that grips me now is that with the few short years encompassing the allotted span of mortal man, so many pinnacles of surpassing beauty will have to be left unexplored and unenjoyed.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I

I AWOKE one morning in the late autumn with the feeling that I ought to be proving myself of some use in the world. I also had a feeling that I was quite qualified to spend more pocket-money than my ha'penny a week. I am not sure at this late date which feeling was paramount, but I have a fair idea.

Many boys I knew augmented their weekly allowance by distributing milk or selling newspapers, and I could see no reason why I should remain any longer in my chronic state of impecuniosity.

The harvesting was in full blast. I had heard that labour was in demand. Men were known to get the fabulous sum of two shillings and sixpence a day; women one shilling and sixpence; grown boys ninepence; all others a penny. I knew I would have to start in as one of the "all others," but I rose cheerfully, veiling my movements with the silence of a military censor, packed several thick slices of bread in my pocket and hurried up the hill to a field where the wheat was being cut.

I sought out the farmer: there was no mistaking him. He was rubicund, pot-bellied, straddle-legged and gruff. He seemed to dominate the entire surroundings. To me, he appeared like Gulliver towering above an army of Lilliputian slaves. Everything spun round at his

word. I spun round myself a few times, as a moth would about a light. I circled and manœuvred for an opening to speak to him. I saw plenty of openings and I took advantage of all of them, but my piping little voice never seemed to reach any higher than the horse shoe compass that swung from his watch chain.

I understood I was now in the world of men, and that I was not of so much account as I was in the school yard, but it appalled me to find to what infinitesimal insignificance I had dwindled; just a little buzzing midge to be brushed aside, or a tiny field mouse liable to be struck at and exterminated at any moment.

The farmer moved forward to direct some work. I did not get out of his way fast enough and his legs got entangled in my person, with the result that I came within range of his vision. He swore at me, but I stood it manfully. I was looking for work. When he finished, I asked him if I could get a job.

"Gang aheid," he said. "Work awa'. That'll be better than standin' idle and gettin' in the wey o' folk."

"What pay will I get?" I ventured.

He looked down at me and I almost wilted away.

"Pay, did you say? Pay? You mercenary young deevil. Oh, weel; a penny a day, like the rest o' your kind; only see you work for't. Off you gang."

And off I went.

A penny a day! It was just twice as much as I had for pocket-money in a week. Besides, it was making a beginning at as high a rate of wages as experienced harvesters got in the Bible times.

Poor little fool; I did not realise that times had changed and so had money.

I threw off my jacket and started in with a will, a humble gleaner in the fields, following far in the rear of the reaping machine and gathering up the ears of wheat left by the men and women who were harvesting

by hand labour in front of me. I worked steadily and earnestly. After half an hour my back became tired from the continuous stooping. After an hour, perspiration was running over my nose and a buzzing sound filled my ears. The sun shone down relentlessly, blinding and burning. I vaguely wondered whether the others were half as tired as I. None of them seemed to be giving in. I did not want to be the first to betray weakness, so I kept at it.

It was my first job and I was terribly in earnest.

A dry, sand-paper thirst was rubbing and scraping in my windpipe; a torturing, spitless thirst which only my longed-for penny, in the converted form of a large bottle of herb beer, could ever oil back to its everyday smoothness. But the penny seemed so hard to earn and still such a long way off.

Over and over that stubble I plodded, growing dizzy and almost blind, gathering stray ears of wheat until they assumed the size and shape of great cucumbers before me, then dwindled to the size of hay seeds when I tried to pick them up, until I lost track of time and location, until numbness came in welcome relief to my aching body and the vision of my penny faded away to nothingness in the haze which enveloped me.

I had read Hood's "Song of the Shirt" at school, but it never seemed to strike me that the "Song of the Wheatheads" was just as pitiful. And I suppose there was a Humane Society in those days too, looking after horses and dogs and cats.

At last the whirring of the reaper stopped and I found myself up among the men and women. A far-away voice mentioned something about dinner-time. I straightened myself and staggered after the others to the side of the field. Dreamily, I watched them unknotting red handkerchiefs and breaking ravenously into great hunks of bread and cheese. I had little heart

for food. It was only when some tender-hearted woman, fancying I had none, offered to share hers with me, that I started in. I discovered then that I was really famishing and could have eaten as much again as I had brought with me. Feeling returned to my body. My scant clothing was sticking to me. I laved my face in a pailful of cold water, I gulped a mouthful of it and became wonderfully revived. The farmer's whistle blew and we passed once more "from refreshment to labour."

All that afternoon, in the sweltering heat, I toiled and boiled and blistered with the dull monotony of a plantation slave.

It struck me that I could stop if I didn't like it, just as the others could do; but I learned early that workers can't afford to stop, they must just work on.

I do not believe much in the stories I hear of harvesters singing in the fields, of the merry laughter and the joyous shouts. I never heard any of them. What I heard was a few swear words, a grunt here and a growl there, but for the most part it was all drab silence.

When the reaping machine stopped again, I knew instinctively that five o'clock had arrived. But I did not care. I straightened myself, then crouched quickly with a cry of pain. So, I remained in a stooping posture for a while longer. I struggled to the side of the field, and gradually I was able to unfold myself sufficiently to enable me to get into my jacket.

I inquired if we were going to get our pay.

One of the men laughed, and his laugh set my blood rushing with a horrible fear that there was something wrong.

"Ay, you'll get your pay when you get the farmer," he joked, as he walked off with his fellows.

His joke was terribly real to me. I scanned the fields, but my employer of the morning had disappeared.

I had worked hard and conscientiously all day and I was tired to exhaustion. Now a mad anger was burning me up, little as I was, leaving me faint and weak. Tears of vexation sprang to my eyes and I cried all the way as I staggered homeward.

My chief concern after that was to obtain my wages. I worked no more in the harvest field, but I waylaid that farmer at every turn. At first he professed to know nothing of me, which I considered a mere trick to get out of paying. Then he told me he would look into it. After a few more days' pestering, he refused to talk to me; he was always in too big a hurry. As I still hung round the front entrance of his house with the persistence of an old occupier's cat, he took to slipping out by the back way. At any rate, it seemed so to me.

When I had been about three weeks endeavouring to collect my just dues and when my patience was at its last ebb, I stepped up fairly and squarely in front of him and said doggedly, "Look here, mister: are you, or are you no' goin' to pay me my wages?"

"How much do I owe you, you little pesterer?" he asked, no doubt dreading legal proceedings.

"Fine you ken," I answered. "It's a penny, and I worked gey hard for it, too."

"There's your penny," he went on gruffly, "and don't come to me for work again."

"No fear o' that, mister," was my parting sally. "I wouldna work for you for a shillin' a day."

That was the only satisfaction I had out of the whole transaction.

II

Like a lion cub, I had tasted blood, and was now anxious to try myself at something bigger.

After a considerable scurrying from shop to shop, all unknown to my mother, who did not share with me at that time my anxiety for work, I engaged myself as spare "cadger" or message boy to a grocer.

I had read in schoolbooks that sometimes a diligent and honest spare message boy was taken on as a regular message boy, and, if he lived long enough and served honourably, he might be promoted to service behind the counter. After that, provided he kept on with his unswerving determination to succeed, it would be merely a matter of time when the owner of the shop would come in one morning, slap him on the back, praise him up to the skies, ask him how much money he had saved, and present him with a written agreement making him a junior partner in the concern. And this would bring into view the ultimate prospect of pushing out the original owner and possessing the whole business himself; book debts, bad debts and all; thereby earning a clear two pounds a week, with groceries at wholesale prices until the end of his days.

One Saturday sufficed to cure me of all hope of ever becoming the sole proprietor of this particular grocery store. All afternoon I tottered and staggered through alleys and up interminable flights of stairs, and along miles and miles of dark corridors, with a loaded basket balanced on my head until I feared the thinking part of me would be pushed right down through my neck and into my chest.

My mother came upon me as I was struggling along the street. Her indignation flared immediately. She ordered me to drop the basket, then she hurried me back to my employer, and there, before a shopful of his best customers (despite her natural hatred of a scene), she talked to him as any mother would whose boy was being imposed on. She ended up by telling him that his basket of provisions was lying at a close-mouth,

two streets away, that people and dogs were poking their noses into it when she left, and if he ever hoped to see it again he had better hurry after it.

Of course, when we got home, I was upbraided for my foolishness, but in spite of that, the super-anxiety to be working still remained with me, although my recent experiences made me a little doubtful if I was exactly designed for heavy, manual labour.

I was now on the look-out for something easy.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I

WHEN the next summer came round, I, with three or four others, landed on a paradise of a job. It consisted of cutting thistles on Sir John Stirling Maxwell's estate, close by, at the rate of ninepence a day. Each of us was given a small sickle and sent out to work wherever there were thistles. The only restriction upon us was that we turn in our sickles at five o'clock every evening and call for them again at eight o'clock on the succeeding morning.

There was no supervision. In consequence, very little thistle cutting was done. We climbed trees, we scrambled dykes, chased rabbits and birds, played leap-frog, bathed in a stagnant, slime-covered pool and had a glorious time generally; now and again knocking the head off an occasional and inoffensive thistle to show our appreciation for the man who employed us.

This lasted exactly six weeks and I netted twenty-seven shillings for the period. But school opened up again and I had to resign this most pleasant, lucrative and congenial occupation.

It remained for Peter, as usual, to tumble on something which afforded us a combination of afternoon employment and enjoyment which lasted us for several years.

There was a large, eighteen-hole golf course on the estate, within a few hundred yards of the outskirts

of the town, and to this place of recreation many business men of the city swarmed early every evening and all day on Saturdays. During my thistle-cutting experiences, Peter had been acting as a caddy. The remuneration was good, but the environment of the work did not appeal to him greatly. The boys were hidebound by regulations and there was little or no freedom permitted. It was as bad as being at school. Before they were allowed to carry clubs for anyone, they had to be licensed by the green-keeper at so much a head. They were penned within an iron-railed enclosure like so many yelping fox-hounds. And they were not even allowed to yelp, so soliciting was forbidden and woe betide any who dared to snap his fingers through the railings to attract the attention of the golfers who were looking them over, for, ten chances to one, a sharp rap over the knuckles with a walking stick or the end of a golf club would be the only reward for his over-anxiety to be chosen.

If it happened to rain, a ten by six feet shelter was reckoned sufficient covering for some fifty boys.

The entire enclosure was overlooked by the green-keeper's house, and if a caddy so much as coughed or sneezed without permission, he was liable to lose his license.

The remuneration was ninepence for a round of some two and a half hours' duration, which was good pay had it been regular. But there were so many older boys on the caddy list that Peter could only be sure of being picked out for service about once every three or four days.

Peter took me out to initiate me into the mysteries of the calling. While I was waiting the return of the green-keeper to inquire regarding the all-necessary enrolment, we sauntered inside the railings where some boys were playing pitch-and-toss, and others were

polishing the clubs of their erstwhile employers. One of the bigger boys was practising "swings." Before I had properly got my bearings, I was cracked over the eye and bowled over like a skittle-pin by the loaded side of a wooden golf-club.

Big and blustering as the club manipulator was, Peter jumped on him like a terrier. In the uproar that ensued, half a dozen golfers rushed round and separated the combatants; then, on top of it all, the green-keeper returned.

Explanations were useless. Peter had been guilty of the heinous offence of starting a fight within the enclosure. His license was torn up before his eyes and he and I found ourselves standing on the dusty roadway, with a closed gate between us and the golf-course; he nursing his wrath, and I my black eye.

"Och, I don't care," remarked my philosophical companion, after we had slowly shuffled through the dust as far as the railway bridge. "I'm just as glad. I ken a better place. They've started a new golf course oot past Curr's farm. They've only two or three caddies and we could knock the heids off ony o' them. It's just nine holes and you only get thrupence a roond, but we can get two roonds every night. And besides, there's no bossy green-keeper like what they have up there, or cages to keep the caddies in, like it was a menagerie. And we can make as much noise as we like. We can go the morrow. We can run oot in half an hour."

Next afternoon, Peter and I set out for the new gold field, full of hope and bread and jelly. We were barefooted and we padded all the way there at a tireless jog-trot.

When we reached the course we noticed a few caddies surrounding the door of the club house. They were about our equal for age, but of a decidedly higher social order than we. They came from the more toney village

of Cathcart. They had boots and stockings on, and wore "mother's pet" collars.

There was a perceptible stir of consternation among them when we swung open the gate and strolled confidently up the pathway, hot and red from our run, our legs and clothes dust-begrimed, our hair blowing towsy in the breeze and our caps sticking out from our jacket pockets. The boldest of the caddies challenged us half-heartedly.

"This place is private to the likes of you. What do you want here?" he asked.

"It's nane o' your business," exclaimed Peter, giving the boy a push and sending him sprawling over the pedal of a bicycle which was standing against the club house.

That ended the discussion.

Half a dozen men came along. We pushed to the front with eager shouts, "Carry your clubs, sir. Carry your clubs."

Our business methods greatly startled the genteel and silent caddies among whom we were.

Whether it was our enterprise or our uncommon appearance, I cannot say, but we were chosen among the first, and in a few minutes Peter and I started out carrying clubs in the same twosome.

Peter initiated me into all the tricks of the game. He showed me how to make a tee, he taught me how to get a bee-line on where the ball dropped, the different clubs, and how to put the regulation polish on the steel ones at the end of the game. It was not long, either, before he knew all the best places to find lost balls, all the men who gave the best prices for them, and the men who could not recognise their own balls when these were offered to them for sale.

We made money, did Peter and I; never less than sixpence an afternoon, sometimes as much as a shilling

and sixpence on a Saturday. Besides, we learned how to play the game at an age when the arm is supple, the eye sure, and the mind malleable.

But, with all my experience and all my practice, I don't think I ever made a really successful caddy. I was too apt to be day-dreaming instead of keeping my eye on the ball, with the result that half my time was taken up searching for the elusive thing. At other times I would be dawdling far in the rear, practising swings with my man's best clubs, slicing the heads off daisies with the precision of a champion.

II

There is a common belief among caddies that if a player has the great good fortune to perform the marvellous feat of holing out with his drive, he is supposed to reward his lucky club-carrier at the end of the game with half-a-sovereign. I never knew of any boy who had received the golden coin and it was more or less legend. But then, I never had known of any specific instance where the golfer had holed in one. We boys had often talked about it, thought about it, dreamed about it, hoping against hope that sooner or later fortune, in the form of a golfer who would hole in one, would smile on us.

The man who generally engaged me to tag at his heels evening after evening over those nine holes was not exactly in the first flight of golfers, and usually he had to be contented with a modest five or six to the hole. He was inclined to be morose and uncommunicative, traits of character which all self-respecting caddies resent. But one evening he displayed a positive skittishness of temperament right at the start of the game.

When he went into the pavilion for a drink of water, or something stronger, prior to beginning, he threw

his bag of clubs at me. When he came out again he pulled off my cap, tossed it on the ground and took a practice shot at it, bursting the lining and knocking the cotton padding out of it. On the teeing ground, as I was placing the ball, he playfully poked me with the business-end of his driver and sent me rolling, head and heels, over the side and down the steep incline.

I just jaloused from all this that something unusual was about to happen. But I hardly thought it would happen so soon as it did.

He drove off. The ball sailed in the air and I lost sight of it, as usual. We searched high and low for it. I turned over every blade of grass from the tee to the first green, without discovering it. I was upbraided for my blindness and my man instructed his partner to hole out. As that gentleman did so he made a wonderful discovery. The well-nigh impossible had happened; my man's ball was snuggling cosily in the hole against the pin.

There was a scene of the wildest jubilation. My man's hand was wrung by his partner; my hand was wrung by his partner's caddy. The news spread like a piece of scandal, and it was only the greatest modesty on the part of my man that caused him to continue the game, instead of going straight back to the pavilion and getting uproariously drunk.

It was a short hole, I admit; "A drive and a putt," as the saying goes. I had done it myself once in three strokes with a hacked, re-made golf ball and an ash walking stick, but that did not detract from the greatness of the achievement, for it was the first time that such a feat as holing in one had been performed on the course.

I went round the remaining eight holes in a dream. I pictured my triumphal appearance at the club house. I gloated over the envy I would create among my fellows. I laid out plans regarding the disbursement of

the half-sovereign which would soon be mine. What I did not do in fancy with that half-sovereign is not worth while trying to remember.

From the eighth hole home, we were followed by a crowd of jealous and admiring caddies, and as my man approached the golf house he was met with a perfect ovation, worth at least half-a-sovereign. While he was inside receiving congratulations and describing to his friends the magnificence of that first drive, the bird-like rise of the ball in the air, the beautiful curve which it described and its unswerving descent right into the cup without even touching the sides, I was busily engaged outside, putting an extra, half-sovereign polish on the clubs and narrating to my fellow caddies how I had ventured to suggest to my record-breaking employer on the first tee that if he moved his left foot over just half an inch, so, and placed his right thumb along the club a little farther down, so; he would get far more out of his drive: how he had taken my advice and by so doing had become famous.

At last I stood at the door of the club house with beaming countenance, ready to receive my reward, almost hemmed in by a circle of gaping and excited caddies. My man waved a laughing good-bye to his friends. He grasped his bag of clubs from me, smiled on me, put his hand deep in his trouser pocket and handed me the wonderful coin.

My heart fluttered. I was almost afraid to look at it, I was so sick with joy. But I plucked up courage at last and did so. I looked at the threepenny-bit, then I looked at him. All I could see of him was his back as he hurried away with his companions.

A cold moisture broke out on my brow and my lips grew dry and tight. All kinds of rash acts were suggested to me by my outraged fellows, for they knew that what affected me to-day might affect them to-morrow.

They told me I ought to complain to the president of the club; that I ought to take the man to court over it; that I ought to waylay him and throw stones at him.

But I simply did as my mother advised me to do on all such trying occasions; I counted one hundred to myself, very slowly. After that, better judgment prevailed and I became philosophical enough to appreciate the fact that this golfer could never take away from me the pleasure I had had as I trudged over the last eight holes; the joy I had had anticipating the disbursement of the half-sovereign I was destined not to receive.

In striking contrast with this, I only have to recall a gentleman for whom I carried at a later period. He took twelve strokes to that first hole and his game left much to be desired. In the course of the game I found myself trying to work out my rate of pay on the basis of my previous experience, and I rejoiced in the knowledge that the irreducible minimum for the entire round was threepence. But at the end of the game this gentleman handed me a shilling and a great amount of praise for my self-control in forbearing to titter or even smile at his most inexcusable misses. That day, I learned never to judge a gentleman by his golf score.

So much for the bagatelle life of a caddy.

CHAPTER TWENTY

I

"HULLO, Peter! What's wrong?" I asked, as I opened the door and gazed upon my lanky playmate who stood before me, awkward but resplendent in a magnificent new suit of clothes. The coat sleeves were probably a little too familiar with his finger tips and maybe the trouser legs dangled farther below the knee than absolute smartness of appearance called for, but these were trivial faults, faults in the right direction, faults that would mend with every day. It was just a fine, loose-fitting suit, betraying all the evidences of having been bought in a real shop; not of the made-down-by-mother kind within which he and I had so long lived, moved and had our being; just the kind of suit I dreamed of by night and hoped for by day.

"There's nothing wrong," he answered, somewhat nervously. "My faither, and mither, and Jamie, and Maggie are at Barrhead, visitin' my married brother, Wullie, and they'll no' be back till the morn's mornin'. They gied me sixpence to look after the hoose till they come back. They bought me this new suit. It cost five shillings and sixpence in one of the big shops in Argyle Street. I got a knife flung into the bargain. We'll hae a rare time," he went on, with a chuckle.

"But where are you going now?" I asked.

"Can you swim?" he queried.

"Of course I can, as weel as you can. You don't need to ask me that, you've seen me crossin' the Wee English Quarry with only one foot on the bottom. Are you going for a swim?"

"No. No' wi' my good suit on," was the careful rejoinder. "And no' when I've got sixpence to spend. Were you ever at the Gorbals Baths?"

I admitted that I was like himself in that regard; I had never been at that wonderful place.

"Well, come on and we'll hae some rare fun."

I obtained permission from my mother to go with Peter, and received also a great deal of instruction as to the caution which would have to be exercised in all water. So we set out for the city, with the understanding that I was to go to Peter's house and stay with him overnight.

We arrived at the baths early in the forenoon. Peter paid tuppence for each of us and we passed through the doors, burdened with towels and bathing drawers, the only appurtenances for the coming experience.

There was a great pond, as large as the Big English Quarry, all tiled, with a deep end and a shallow end, and a slippery, tiled platform all round it, with steps leading up to where the swimmers undressed.

We were soon inside one of these cubicles, getting rid of our superfluous garments.

Peter still had tuppence left over out of his presentation sixpence, and as he could hardly take it into the water with him, he decided to place it for safety on a piece of jutting woodwork in the dressing box, because he knew that if anyone came in with intent to steal, the first place he would make for would be our trouser pockets.

All day long we spluttered and sported in the swimming tank, half-drowned half a dozen times; we rubbed and lathered and scrubbed ourselves in the bath-houses at the end of it, flaying ourselves in boiling sprays and

gasping for breath under icy-cold showers, until our pores were open and empty and not a pin head of animal fat could have been found on the surface of our puckered bodies. The attendant warned and rewarned us that our time was up. At last he became exasperated at us and bundled our dripping bodies into the dressing box, threatening to throw us out into the street as we were, if he did not find us dressed and ready to go in five minutes.

When at last we got outside, a peculiar yet strangely familiar yearning sensation began to invade our stomachs. I mentioned it to Peter and we came to the conclusion that we were hungry.

"But that's a' richt," he said. "I ken a rare place where we can get a chitterin' bite. It's a restaurant, Grannie McLaughlan's in the Gorbals—seven Paris buns and a tea-pot full o' warm tea for tu'pence."

It did not take us long to find the shop. We went inside and seated ourselves at a table behind a partition as if we had dined in restaurants all the hectic days of our lives.

The lady appeared. She was fat. She waddled. Peter sang out his order, in imitation of Jim ordering penny dreadfuls in Girnie McGruchie's. In another minute we were smilingly entrenched behind a mountain of seven, sugar-topped, Paris buns and a volcano-looking teapot, belching steam.

"Do you mind bringin' us another cup, mistress?" asked Peter politely. "We're sharin' up."

The lady looked at us, gripped her hands in front of her under her apron, and sniffed disgustedly. I feared for a second that she was about to refuse the modest and polite request.

"Huh!" she exclaimed, a little enigmatically, "I jist thocht as much when you came in; half-starved craturs from the 'Shaws, I'm thinkin'."

But the extra cup was produced and Peter and I attacked the buns ravenously.

When we finished we were still hungry, but we swilled steaming tea into us until the buns swelled inside in a most satisfactory manner, and every nook and cranny was filled, and a most comfortable feeling possessed us. We got up to leave. Peter stepped to the counter like a man to pay his score. He stuffed his hand into his trouser pocket. He drew it out again, empty. He hurriedly thrust his other hand into his trouser pocket on the other side, then his eyes bulged and his chin dropped. He tried all his remaining pockets, and these were indeed numerous. He pulled off his bonnet and began to search the lining of it as a last resort.

"Jings!" he exclaimed in consternation, "I've lost my tu'pence."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than Mrs. McLaughlan was round the counter and between us and the open doorway.

"That's a fine ham and haddie, but it's been worked here ower often," she cried angrily. "Go back in there, ye thievin' young blackgairds. It's the polis for you this time."

I was far too terror-stricken to speak; and Peter—resourceful, cunning Peter—completely lost his ability to think.

"What'll we do?" he cried, turning to me.

"You'll just do nothing. You'll stay right where ye are. The polis will settle this," put in the excited shop-women.

She hurried to the door.

"Here," she cried to a passing newsboy, "run to the corner and get the polis."

We felt as if we had only a few minutes more to live, and we shivered and trembled in our anxiety.

Then, quite suddenly, a brilliant flash of memory came back to me.

"Peter," I shouted, "the tu'pence is on the ledge in the dressing box."

"That's where it is," he replied. "I'll go and tell the wife."

Peter explained the matter to Mrs. McLaughlan at the door and asked permission to go and get the money.

"We could leave our bonnets wi' ye till we come back wi' the money," he offered.

She herded him back, striking her fist into the palm of her left hand.

"Back you go wi' your tricks," she screamed. "I wouldna gi'e tu'pence for every stitch you hae on ye."

This was a hard knock to Peter with his new five shillings and sixpenny suit.

We were at our wits end, and when a tall, blue-uniformed man filled the doorway, tears came to Peter's eyes and he cried without restraint. This was a good excuse for me, so his swan song became a duet.

Too much barter with the slops of humanity had hardened Mrs. McLaughlan against reliance in personal appearances, but to our intense relief the same thing did not apply in the case of the policeman; he was inclined to be more trusting.

He listened with patience to Peter's pathetic wail.

"Off you go to the baths then, my man," he said. "Your chum can stay here as hostage, and if you are not back inside of five minutes with the tu'pence, off he goes with me to jail."

Peter bolted.

"Hurry, Peter, hurry!" I shouted anxiously after him, for all my hopes of liberty were centred on his race against time.

Minute by minute flew by, with no sign of Peter.

The calloused Mrs. McLaughlan laughed scornfully into the policeman's face.

"I kent it. Fine I kent it, you big sumph. Deil the hide or hoof o' him, or my tu'pence, will ye ever see. You havena been long on the Gorbals beat, my mannie, I'm thinkin'," she commented sarcastically.

I could see from the constable's face that he was beginning to fear he had made a mistake, and every time he looked at his watch I could hear the bolt shooting in the prison door, I could taste the hard bread and the sloppy water, and I could feel the sting of the birch-rod. Yet I wondered what could be delaying Peter, for I knew he never would desert me, even to escape prison.

The policeman's patience became exhausted.

"Well," he exclaimed at last, "you had better come along with me." He caught me by the arm and made to push through the crowd which had gathered about the door.

But, oh, what a relief! Peter dashed in at the opening.

And never was seen so miserable an object as he presented. He looked like a half-drowned cat with a brick round its neck. He was saturated from head to foot. His brand new suit was a total wreck. Water was dripping from his sleeves and from his trousers. Tears of vexation were pouring down his cheeks and mingling with the general flow, until it was impossible to say whether it was salt or fresh water that oozed from his boots.

But somehow his personal appearance was not my chief concern. I looked at him inquiringly in an endeavour to discover whether home or the prison was to shelter us for the night.

Peter walked bravely up to the counter, leaving a puddle at every step.

"There's your old tu'pence, mistress," he cried, rattling the coins under her nose.

He turned to me, with the imperious air of a battle commander after a victory.

"We're free. Come on. Let us get hame oot o' this."

There was laughing and jeering as we sallied forth, and it was not until we had left the crowd far behind us that I ventured to speak to Peter. I sent out the usual query.

"What's wrong, Peter?"

"Wrong! Everything's wrong," he exclaimed. "Look at my claes—cost five shillings and sixpence in a big shop in Argyle Street—spoiled the very first time I hae them on. I'll catch it when my faither comes hame."

"But what did it, Peter?"

"I was in the baths and runnin' up the steps to the dressing-box," he went on tearfully. "I didna ken there was a man inside the box. He was comin' oot at the same time as I was runnin' in. He pushed the door open on me and it shoved me off the slippery top step. I fell backwards, slid ower the tiles and into the water.

"Look at that hole." He exhibited a circular opening such as a dock-labourer sometimes leaves in a sack of sugar. "They took me oot o' the water wi' a hook at the end o' a pole. I telt them something though. But that didna mend the hole in my troosers. I had to come away, for I thought they would have ye in jail."

"Never mind," I commiserated, "it isn't so bad. We can put on a good fire and dry your clothes when we get hame, and then iron them oot the way Stark the tailor does. Nobody will ken, for the hole the hook has made isn't very big, and oor Mary can sew it up for ye."

II

Peter never held trouble long. With his old clothes on and a blazing fire drying his unfortunate ones, he brightened up wonderfully.

While we waited for the iron to heat thoroughly, we had an accident with the glass front of Peter's mother's kitchen clock, caused by a miss-shot from Peter's air-gun. We turned the broken face to the wall, feeling certain that his mother would not notice it all at once.

When the iron was nicely hot, we set-to on the damp clothes. I held the garments in place and Peter ironed with all the skill of an experienced laundry-maid. The suit was beginning to look so well under the crease-destroying process that Peter's most latent fears vanished.

All was going swimmingly well; all would have ended well, but——

We began to talk about the next morning's breakfast, and Peter and I went into the pantry to see what we could see.

"There's an egg," said Peter confidently, as we poked about. "It's in the hoose some place, for I heard my mither talkin' aboot it. Maybe they've hidden it, though. Onyway, there's plenty o' meal for porridge. There's always plenty o' meal. I don't like porridge very weel. Do you?"

I admitted that I was rather fond of it (or *them*, as we referred to porridge in those days. It was always possible then to tell a Scotsman by his reference to porridge in the plural).

"My faither's an awful fly yin, though," continued Peter, with a shake of his head. "Every mornin' I get a big bowl o' porridge, and he tells me if I don't sup up every spoonful o' it I'll no' get ony ham and eggs. When I eat a' the porridge up, I havena room for ham and eggs. But it doesna matter, for there never is ony ham and eggs onyway, exceptin' maybe on Sundays."

With the broken clock and the scanty larder, I was beginning to rue my bargain with Peter, for I knew my mother had laid in fresh fish for the Sunday breakfast. But such selfish materialism as this was knocked quickly

out of me. A peculiar odour began to invade the house. I sniffed; then Peter sniffed.

"That's an awful queer smell, Peter," I ventured.

He flew to the kitchen table. I followed.

A volume of smoke was rising from it. Peter had left the hot iron sitting on the seat of his new trousers. The complete shape of a shield was eaten out, front and back, and the same "coat of arms" was branded brown on the white-scoured table.

In the circumstances, I decided that I had better go home, as it would be just as well that there should be peace, and quietness, and privacy, in Peter's home when Peter's parents returned.

Not until the Monday did I see Peter. He was calm and very much subdued. His new suit had been replaced by a jersey and baggy moleskin trousers clipped off at the knees.

"Jings, there was an awful row," he said. "My faither said if it wasna for folk talkin', he would make me run aboot wi' nothing on at a'. He says if I can wear oot these troosers, it's mair than he's been able to do these twenty years."

Peter tried, and he tried hard, but the moleskins beat him. He wore them, glazed and dirty, and without a hole in them, for as long as his lanky legs could get decently into them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I

In common with other boys, the bump of inquisitiveness was written large on the foreheads of Peter and me.

A box with its lid securely fastened was an irresistible magnet. We would buzz round the keyhole of a closed door with the persistence of a fly about a bald head. A ray of light squeezing through a chink in the woodwork of the old stable which the footballers used as training quarters held us fascinated and curious, with eyes glued and ears strained to catch something of what was going on inside, all oblivious of darkness, swirling winds and sopping rains.

From grim necessity, our pleasures had to be derived from the outside of everything and our realisation was more a conjecture than a complete gratification. We had no right to be prying into what was locked up, we were too young to be permitted within the sacred precincts of the footballers' pavilion, and we had no money to pay for admissions to any of the entertainments which came to town. But for all that, our continual prowling in quest of something out of the common brought us within hail of many amusing and mysterious exhibitions.

There was always in those days the German band to look forward to on Saturday forenoons, and as it played

the same three tunes at every corner in the town, we had splendid opportunities of becoming familiar with the band's repertoire.

A barrel-organ was ever a fresh divert. If it happened to be accompanied by a monkey, the divert became a delight.

Once in a while, an open-air juggler would hold us gaping and thrilled by his marvellous feats: and an itinerant fire-eater and sword-swallower, who would swallow your watch (if you had one) and, for a penny, would let you put your ear to the outside of his bare stomach to hear the watch ticking in his internals as he held it suspended down his throat at the end of the chain, such a one would keep us spellbound and even had us emulating him by trying to swallow little pieces of slate pencil at the end of a piece of string.

Occasionally we were entertained by a buirdly, red-nosed individual, dressed in sailor costume, who defied any man in the audience to bind him with ropes so securely that he would be unable to extricate himself from them. Once he was trussed up, he would refuse to go on with his exhibition until the modest sum of two shillings and sixpence was thrown into the ring. I have seen him stand in this uncomfortable position for over an hour, patiently waiting the few odd coppers required to make up the total. We were always sure, however, if there was a shilling in the ring and if we waited long enough, that he would spit on the ground in disgust, give vent to a few nautical expressions, then set to and liberate himself after a few minutes' work; collecting his coins, winding up his ropes and making straight for the public house across the way.

In the absence of any of those attractions, we had the Salvation Army meeting on the square to fall back on, and there was hardly a more exciting game than chasing each other round and round the outside of the singing

and praying ring, cutting in and out among the enthusiastic singers and instrumentalists, or right across the circle, making a carpet of the banner spread to receive the collection. No matter how exasperated those good people might be at our conduct, we knew that if they caught us we would suffer nothing more than a few mild words of reprimand, which, of course, were worse than useless with young rascals out for all the fun they could find.

Every second Friday, at the Cart Brig, we could bank on the nigger quack doctor; and furthermore, he grew to bank on us, for he found in me a willing and patient torch-bearer and in Peter an ever-ready subject for all his demonstrations and miracles. The doctor used to stand there, behind his frail, folding table, in the full flare of his spluttering torch, surrounded by an interested but sadly impecunious crowd of idlers, his top hat on the back of his woolly head, his frock coat thrown back and his thumb thrust in the armhole of his fancy waistcoat, as a complete dictionary of perfectly pronounced words tumbled from between his white teeth and his great, cracked, red lips, as he expounded on the marvels of his concoctions of Nature's herbs, panaceas for all ills, real and imaginary, and guaranteed to cure anything under the sun and over it, from tooth-ache to a hole in the bottom of a kettle.

"I have in my audience to-night," he would say, "a young lad who has been suffering frightful agonies from a very simple cause. He has come to me, with tears in his eyes but without a penny in his pocket, beseeching me in the name of humanity to release him from his maddening misery. Do you think I would turn away this young fellow townsman of yours simply because he has no money? No, sirs. Before you all, and entirely free of charge to either him or you, I propose now to demonstrate that I am here entirely for the benefit of

sick and ailing humanity. This lad is suffering from an ingrown toe-nail, a simple trouble but excruciating in its tortures, from which death itself might be a happy release.

"I will now ask this young friend to come forward."

Long before any move was made, the majority of the audience knew that Peter would be the innocent sufferer so pathetically pictured and, as he finally pushed through to the table, a general titter would run round the circle.

The black oracle would order Peter to wash his ailing foot thoroughly in a basin of water which he had at hand ready for the experiment, then the demonstration of instantaneous healing would be gone through in deep solemnity, until, on being questioned, Peter would admit that the pain had entirely gone.

Brisk sales would ensue among the more gullible at the back of the crowd.

If the malady under analysis were nervous debility, Peter would be again to the fore, a willing subject; even "eating diabetes" he would have "something awful."

One night, owing to the superior attraction of a Band of Hope magic-lantern entertainment, we failed to put in an appearance at the Cart Brig, and the sales of his Black Darkness fell almost to nothing. Greatly perturbed, he searched high and low for us on the following day and we came to terms with him at the rate of threepence a night for the two of us, cash in advance. Some evenings we would have to wait until the first sale before our employer was able to pay us, but we always found him strictly honest and even generous to the extent of an extra penny and a stick of corn salve thrown in to each of us if his business came up over the average.

II

Our first experience of an entertainment where we paid real money for admission, did not instil in us any too good an opinion of the integrity of the individuals who ran those shows. It put us on our guard against all future catch-penny traps that came our way, and, if for that alone, I do not grudge the cost, although at the time had our entertainer been torn limb from trunk by wild lions, or tied to a log, naked, and left in the heart of a Brazilian forest swamp to be eaten alive by red ants (as some of our "penny dreadful" heroes had been), we would have considered it no more than his just punishment.

As the school was emptying for dinner one day, there was a man standing at the gate giving out handbills which shrieked to us in bold type that the most marvellous illusionist of modern times would positively appear that afternoon, at 4.30 in a certain hall. Sleight of hand tricks, card manipulation, rabbits and eggs produced from nowhere; and every trick taught so that the simplest schoolboy could perform them afterwards; admission one penny; free distribution of sweets at the close of the entertainment.

Every boy who could beg, borrow or purloin the requisite penny was there.

The hall was packed to overflowing and the wonderful wizard of legerdemain, who proved to be the bill distributor as well as the cashier at the door, presented himself on the platform with a great deal of talk and his usual hats, handkerchiefs, fans and boxes, without which the average illusionist would feel like a man parading Buchanan Street in Glasgow in bathing pants.

Our entertainer had a broken nose, black, oily hair plastered against his scalp, a drooping, moist-looking moustache and what I know now for a cauliflower ear.

He did succeed in bringing a half-starved rabbit from a top hat and he transferred a pigeon from one box to another right under our eyes. He produced an egg from Peter's ear, much to Peter's astonishment. Peter wanted to take the egg with him when he went back to his seat, because he thought it was his, having come out of his ear, but the man would have none of that. These tricks, with the passing and repassing of a few coins and the usual shuffling of cards, completed his display. He did not show us how a single trick was performed, and that was really what we had paid our pennies for. He seemed in a most inordinate hurry to bundle us out and to get away himself, and altogether we were not more than half an hour in the hall.

With profuse apologies, he sprang the news on us of the non-arrival of the promised sweets. He said the boxes had gone astray in the railway company's hands; but everything would be all right, for he had left instructions that they were to be delivered at the school on the following day, when the master would see that one package was handed to every boy and girl present at the entertainment.

That was a mean, shallow, shabby kind of subterfuge, but it worked quite successfully. Inquiry of the master next day brought merely a surprised look on his face that we should all be so astoundingly gullible.

We might have known, for the man did not give us any cards or tickets by which we could be identified later. But we had not then acquired the protective reasoning faculties which the perpetration of a series of such despicable frauds on children seldom fails to cultivate.

III

A travelling lottery visited the town and remained as long as the money came in, or until the police moved it

on. I cannot recall the reason, if I ever knew it, but the period of its stay extended over two weeks. The method of working the lottery consisted of a free, tenth-rate, vaudeville entertainment on a platform erected in the open-air, in which the comedian was the chief attraction—the old style of comedian with an alarm clock for a watch and a full-sized horse-shoe dangling from a dog-chain across his grotesquely-patterned waistcoat; the comedian who invariably carried a walking stick with a crook handle which he hooked round the neck of his partner when he became exasperated with him or when he desired closer communion. I have seen him perform this old piece of byplay fifteen times in an hour and he never once failed to raise a wild burst of laughter from the onlookers. In all, I must have seen this slap-stick performance a thousand times and it gave me a thousand laughs.

The songs sung were intended to be funny; generally they were coarse, sometimes vulgar; the kind of songs that impress themselves indelibly on the minds of children, all of whom have a special faculty for retaining what is not intended for their ears and eyes, although fortunately for the preservation of youth, sex allusions generally pass over the heads of the immature, and while they are remembered, they mean nothing more than words.

Although it is now over thirty years since I stood looking up among that crowd, listening to those comedians, the melodies and the words of the songs still stay with me. The chorus of one, telling of the rejection of an ardent lover by his lady-love's more ardent father, runs thus:

You should have seen me go; you should have seen
me fly;
Out of the window with a kick, and a lump upon
my eye.

He whistled and called me back, but his labour was all in vain.
You may bet with the odds a thousand to one, I'll never go there again.

During the recital, ticket sellers were busy passing through the crowd doing a roaring trade.

The first prize in the drawing usually consisted of a clothes-basket full of cheap crockery; the second prize a half-crown alarm clock; the third prize a pipe. There were no blanks; every ticket holder was presented with a pencil, evidently for the purpose of keeping within the law in some way.

IV

When this amusement moved away, a strange-looking, zinc arrangement was run up in its place. In the evening we found out that it belonged to the lowest rung of the histrionic profession; it was a "penny gaff," or a "penny geggie." We were not long in finding a seam in the zinc through which we could catch the narrowest of glimpses of the stage. I can smell the peculiar metallic odour of that zinc yet.

I can recollect seeing a gaunt figure strutting the cupboard-like platform. The figure was draped in black tights and presented in appearance the nearest approach to my conception at that time of his majesty, the Devil. Now I come to think of it, the play must have been *Hamlet*, for the figure had in his hand a round loaf of bread shaped out to represent a skull—Yorick's skull. I can fancy the sincerity with which that thin, half-starved Hamlet would recite to the loaf, "Alas! I knew him well," and the longing he must have had for closer intimacy with the bread-made skull and a glass of beer.

The man who shouted at the door of this tin theatre, "the barker," never could have been a boy himself, for he operated a regular two-minute habit of going round the entire outside, inspecting the perforations in the zinc structure and applying a cane with the most vicious glee to the strained trousers of every bending peeping Tom he happened on.

Another stage of our education was reached when we awoke one morning to discover the entire town hidden under flaring posters announcing the approaching arrival of a wild beast show, with a circus of three rings and a full street parade.

The caravans came into town overnight, as they generally do. Peter and I were on the grounds by six o'clock in the morning, trying to find out if there was any possible way of earning a free admission, but our efforts were futile, and we were compelled to resign ourselves to making the most of what we could see on the outside.

We were late in getting to school that morning, and so were a great many more of our fellows. We simply refused to work. The strap was unavailing. Our teachers had reached the end of their patience, when a brief consultation was held with the master who decided to allow us off at half-day if we diligently settled down to our lessons for the forenoon.

For the greater part of two days we practically lived around the great tents, wallowing in a Paradise of mud, and dirt, and offal; gaping and gazing at elephants and camels and horses, and surrounding the black attendants like bees. Every one of those niggers was a source of wonder; every one was a hero in our eyes. When he blew his nose, he was admired openly by a circle of wide-mouthed youngsters. And the nigger revelled in it too, for there was ostentation in his manner of throwing out a bucket of slops. We became envious of

the familiar ease with which he could roll a wad of chewing tobacco in his cheek and spit, and we practised it on the sly with the juice from a toffee-ball. The boy that had a hole in his front tooth to spit through in those days was indeed a hero. What a conscious air of ability those niggers had when they bit through the air with their long whips. There were strong theatricals in the way they buffeted and ordered the elephants about, just as if they were ordinary dogs or cats, or maybe horses. It was a pleasure and an honour to sweat and slave carrying water for those niggers and running messages for them.

When the show had long departed, we would revisit the scenes of former glory and gaze with regret and wistfulness on the circles worn out in the grass by the horses as they had trotted round the circus rings, and although we had never been inside, we gathered all that had been seen second-hand and repeated it as if we really had been there.

V

With such a variety of happenings it was only natural that our tastes rose and we felt ourselves becoming almost æsthetic in the matter of amusements. When a ghost show took up its winter abode on the old grounds, giving "three long acts and a laughable farce," at every performance, we found that with care and economy during the week we could afford the luxury of a visit every Saturday, going up the front steps and thrusting our pennies through the window of the pay-box, just like men, and taking up our position as near to the footlights as was permissible for the price we paid.

What a new world opened up to us, and how real it all seemed!

We wept in sympathy with old black Tom, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; our hearts leapt with merriment at the maudlin antics of the revellers in *Muldoon's Picnic*; our flesh crept in horror at the throat-cutting murders of *Sweeny Todd, the Fleet Street Barber*.

Somehow or other, after I had seen the last mentioned, my taste took a decided turn in the direction of melodrama; the more blood-curdling the title of the play, the more anxious I was to see it. Not that I derived any real pleasure from these, for I used to slink home when the performance was over, shivering from top to toe with fear, as I shunned the dark streets and rushed past alley-mouths as if each of them held the very devil himself. Sometimes I would wake up in the night from the most horrible nightmares; old Uncle Tom would be cutting Muldoon's throat with Sweeny Todd's bloody razor. But as sure as Saturday came round again, I would be crowding with Peter and the others at the front entrance, clamouring for another "hair from the dog that bit me."

I can remember one time watching one of the usual dramas, in which the villain was murdered in icy-cold blood. He died, in harrowing detail, all over the stage and in full view of the audience. His "last kicks" caused intense delight to a well-known, half-witted character of the town, called "Daft Dick," who happened to be sitting near me. All went well until the show was over. As we were crowding out, I heard a tremendous commotion at the exit. I crawled under seats and squeezed between legs to ascertain the cause of this outbreak.

Daft Dick had hold of the late villain by the coat sleeve, and was gesticulating wildly with his free hand, slavering at the sides of his mouth in excitement and anger.

"Gie's my money back. Gie's my money back," he

cried wildly. "It's a big cheat. It's naething but a great big cheat." Dick appealed frantically to the onlookers. "Look at him; he's supposed to be deid. He's no' deid at a'. He's leevin' a' the time."

Everybody laughed and poor Dick failed to get satisfaction.

Personally I did not see anything to laugh at. At that time, I felt about the same way over it as Daft Dick did.

The mention of Daft Dick recalls an amatory incident in his strange career. Dick was not daft enough to be considered a lunatic; he just had a decided "want" about him. Every Scottish town and village harboured one of him.

At one time he drove a milk cart for a farmer and, in the course of his daily round, had to call with milk at a large lunatic asylum several miles out of town. His arrival there was always the cause of merriment among the female nurses, who used to play tricks on him and poke fun at his expense.

Dick took a violent fancy to a pretty, little brunette, to whom he was in the habit of bringing flowers and anything else he thought she would accept. One day he brought her a sack of turnips and was quite broken-hearted when she insisted on him taking them away with him again.

At the instigation of some of the nurses, Dick screwed up courage to ask the lady of his affection if she would go with him for a walk some evening. In order to keep up the fun, she promised Dick that she would be glad to do so.

At the time appointed, Dick presented himself at the nurses' entrance, dressed to kill, in a second-hand morning coat, light trousers that concertinaed down to his feet, a felt hat, woollen gloves, a Gladstone collar half a dozen sizes too big for him and cuffs tripping

him. He had a walking stick hanging on his arm, a flower in his button-hole and a bouquet in his hand. His face was wreathed in a satisfied but inane smile.

The nurses, all but the one he had come to walk out, met him at the door. They gazed at the spectacle before them, then went off in twos and threes along the corridor to have their laugh out.

"What would you like, sir?" asked one with all the solemnity she could muster and feigning not to know him.

Dick grinned.

"What would you like, sir?" she asked again.

"Eh, I cam' for the nurse," he tittered bashfully, fumbling with his tie and the buttons of his clothes from the top of the waistcoat right down.

"What nurse?"

"Och! fine ye ken: the nice wee yin wi' the broon hair," replied Dick.

"I am sorry, sir, but I think you have made a mistake."

"Naw, I havena. This is the nicht I'm to gang for a walk wi' her."

"Really, my man, you must be mistaken. Why, we don't even know who you are."

"Don't ken me?" exclaimed Dick in surprise. "Don't ken me, an' me here every day." He grinned as it dawned on him. "Oh, ay;—it'll maybe be my new claes you don't ken."

"No, sir. We don't know you here."

"Don't ken Dick?"

"Never saw you before."

"Weel, weel, if this doesna beat a'," he remarked, nonplussed, and looking down at himself as if to make sure that he really was himself and not someone else.

By this time the other nurses were hiding behind

the door, stuffing their mouths with their handkerchiefs to stifle their mirth.

Dick began to fear that he had dressed himself completely out of his bewitching personality.

"Do you ken fermer McDougall?" he asked in a last endeavour to prove his identity.

"Why, yes, of course. We all know him."

Dick's face brightened up.

"And do you ken the milk-cairt that comes here every mornin'—the yin wi' the big, blue-painted barrels?" he continued.

"Yes, yes, of course," replied the nurse.

"Weel," he concluded, "yon's me."

A roar greeted poor Dick's sally and the door banged on him, sending him staggering down the stone steps where he remained for an hour afterwards looking among the gravel for a cuff-link that he had lost out of his shirt-sleeve in the excitement.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I

We had heard somewhere from someone that to have a healthy mind one required a healthy body. If this precept had been reversed, it might have encouraged us to study our lessons with greater diligence, for we were more concerned in emulating the feats of Sampson, in "carrying off the Gates of Gaza," and "smiting a thousand men with the jaw bone of an ass," than sitting, hunched up, poring over signs and cyphers in an endeavour to ascertain, to a hair's breadth, the distance between the earth and the moon on a moonless night, or how many cows, sheep and pigs a farmer could buy with a given sum of money at given prices, or the cost of wall-papering a bedroom. What we desired were the muscles of a blacksmith and the physical confidence that went with them that did not require to give way an inch on the pavement to any boy we disliked.

I was stout and felt sure I should run to muscle on the slightest provocation. Peter was rangy, and muscles never had been on friendly terms with his limbs. I was inclined to be derisive with him on this account, but he put me on my back in a wrestling match and I became at once more respectful of the sinew which he claimed he possessed although invisible to the naked eye.

At nine o'clock one night, after a minute inspection of my muscles and Peter's sinews under the wind-

blown flicker of a street gas-lamp, we arranged a programme of physical culture for the ensuing summer months.

Peter's brother Jim had a pair of six-pound dumb bells, the loan of which Peter thought he might be able to steal. I had a trapèze. With these appurtenances, in the Merrilee Wood, between the hours of six and seven-thirty every morning, finishing up with a cold bath in a slimy puddle of a stream nearby, we concluded that at the end of our course Sergeants Rufus and Cauldfingers, the local constabulary, would shiver in their shoes as we passed them in the street and offer up a devout prayer of thankfulness that we were two law-abiding citizens and not poachers.

"You're a good riser," said Peter. "Bring your trapèze and whistle under my window at half-past five the morn's mornin'; and I'll be doon in a jiffy."

Punctually as the mill whistle was blowing the cobwebs from the hundreds of sleepy brains of hundreds of yawning and stretching workers, my shrill whistle floated upward to where I presumed Peter lay. For five, long, weary minutes I whistled the same whistle, but got no response. I changed the signal and shouted, "Haw, Peter! Haw, Peter!" loud and long, until every close, every coal-cellar, every ashpit shouted back at me.

I heard the sound of a window being raised. A boot whizzed past my ear and clattered on the flagstones. I looked up to remonstrate with Peter for being too funny, when a white, flannel night-shirt, with broad pink stripes, and a hairy head attached, poked itself out of the window and emptied a jug of water over me.

A voice cried, "Awa' hame to yer bed, ye silly sowl."

And before I could get the water out of my eyes the window went down with a bang and everything was quiet again.

I took the voice's advice, vowing vengeance on Peter.

"You're a fine man," I exclaimed sarcastically, when I met my chum in the playground.

"What way?" he asked.

"You never got up, and somebody in your hoose timmed water on me."

"I didna ken a thing," returned Peter genially, "until my mither hit me on the jaw wi' a wet dishcloot at a quarter to eight.

"But I forgot to tell ye that I was sleepin' with my brither Jimmy in the back bedroom. You must have whistled under my faither's window. But I've got a better idea noo. Come the morn's mornin'. You'll see a string hangin' oot o' the window. Give it a wee chug and I'll be doon beside you in no time."

Prompt to the second I was under Peter's window, with the end of his alarm string in my hands. I did not know the exact nature of his invention, but as I knew from past experience that it took a lot to rouse Peter in the mornings, I hung on to the string with both hands and pulled. There was quite a little resistance, and I fancied that Peter was up to more of his funny work. I flattered myself that I could pull just as hard as he could, so I set my feet against the wall and hauled in the string, hand over hand, like the steamboat man on the pier at the Broomielaw.

All of a sudden there was a commotion inside and I could distinctly hear the sound of blows. Evidently Peter and his brother, Jimmy, were having it out.

Then a new sound broke forth. "Stop chuggin'. Hey, stop chuggin'." It was the agonised cry of Peter. "You're pullin' my toe aff."

Peter's system of communication now dawned on me. I stopped. But by that time the entire household was aroused and angry. However, Peter joined me and we set out in search of muscle and might.

"Man," he said, "when I felt something at my big toe, I thought it was Jimmy. I telt him to stop and he just grunted, so I hit him on the nose. Then we had a terrible fight, before I minded what it was."

Next morning, the same process was gone through, but Peter had resorted to the less painful expedient of tying his end of the string to the bedclothes instead of to his toe, and I had the entire coverings of the bed down in the backyard beside me without so much as raising an eyelid of either of the slumberers above.

I got tired of these polite methods of handling Peter, so I clambered up the rain-water pipe which ran alongside his window, and soon I had him on the floor, ready for his physical culture course.

During that entire summer, I adopted this last method of waking Peter. He and I wrought like galley slaves in an endeavour to bring our recalcitrant physiques to perfection's pitch, but we were not long in finding out that we were striving to reach a higher level than Nature had designed for us.

II

In a casual way I got to know a man who had a bicycle to dispose of, cheap. I confided the information to Peter and we set out to investigate the would-be bargain, with a view if possible of adding it to our stock of athletic apparatus.

The bicycle proved to be a heavy, rickety machine, rusty and stiff. With the exception of the tyres, it was all there, and that was a decided consideration.

"How much do you want for it?" I asked the owner.

"Half-a-croon," came the answer.

"We thought ye were sellin' it cheap," I ventured.

The man took a long draw at his pipe and looked me over scathingly. "Is that no' cheap?" he exclaimed.

"Did you expect me to swop it for a farthing box of beveridge? There it is—a beauty and a bargain. Half-a-croon—tak' it or leave it."

We could see that the man did not care whether we bought it or not, and so we became all the more anxious to possess it. But, unfortunately, we only had one shilling and sixpence saved up between us. So we took it, yet we left it—as he suggested.

We asked him if he would hold it for us for another day. He promised to do so. We succeeded in the meantime in securing two more partners from our most intimate acquaintances. Next day we closed the deal, and, with that joyfully airy feeling of youth in the possession of something new (even if second-hand), we trundled it off in triumph, with nothing worse than a few jeers from our jealous schoolmates.

"Where are ye goin' wi' the kitchen fender?" one shouted.

For his impertinence, he received a clip under the chin from Peter that made him bite his tongue.

Even after we had given the bicycle two coats of black enamel and a saturation of sweet oil, it only bore the same relation to a bicycle as a mule does to a Derby winner. The most polite thing we could say about it was that it had been a bicycle.

It was called a "safety" and it lived up to its name. The tyre rims were broad, as broad almost as the rims of a steam-road roller. It was almost impossible to upset it. It stood upright when it was alone, and it stood upright when it had company. To give it its due, this was a great convenience to anyone who rode it, for if he happened to want to converse with a friend, all he had to do was to stop and sit and talk as if he were on horseback. When going down a hill we had to grind it just as hard as when on a level stretch, while it would baulk at the slightest incline and we would

then have to carry it up bodily. It became the derision of the neighbourhood and a source of amusement to the evening-idlers who came to watch our antics on it on the quiet road we called Howie's Hill.

But it soon became a sort of white elephant on our hands, and after letting it lie in a coal cellar for two weeks, in the hope of finding a buyer, we decided to sell it in parts.

We disposed of the saddle to one boy for one shilling and sixpence, the handle-bars to another for a shilling, and the single pedal which remained for sevenpence, so that when we came to divide up, we had had our fun and were a penny each to the good, after allowing threepence for the enamel and the sweet oil.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I

THE wonderful financial success of our last venture induced us to make an effort to consolidate our partnership.

The personnel of our company consisted of Peter and me, a semi-English boy whom we called "Alf-a-hinch," and another boy, some three years older than we were, but cat-witted enough to seem of the same age. This boy's nickname was "Shabby." He drove a bread van for a living.

We convened a meeting in my bedroom, and there, behind closed doors, we solemnly formed a secret society. It was to be called "The Society of the Mailed Fist." The name was not original, but we did not know at that time that it had something to do with the then German emperor and that he owned the copyright. But, even had we known, I question if we would not still have persisted in the theft of it, irrespective of the consequences, it sounded so good and so belligerent.

The object of our club was mutual protection, combined with resistance of all outside interference, and aggression when and where necessary.

The badge of the club was a piece of Stewart tartan ribbon to be worn in the coat button-hole. Our reason for choosing this particular pattern of badge was simply

that it happened to be the first attractive piece of ribbon we found lying handy in my sister's work-basket.

As all societies with which we had been connected started in my extorting dues or taking up a collection, we thought the best thing we could do would be to pool the profits of our last transaction and, with this fourpence as a nest-egg in the treasury, and a further ha'penny a week which we agreed to subscribe, we felt we would soon be in a fair way to tackle anything big of a business nature that might offer fair prospects of profit.

As Shabby was a violinist—or rather, as he owned a violin with a black case that had a key to it—he was made treasurer, but on the strict understanding that he should keep the money safely locked up.

All through the winter, every Saturday night, with child-like faith worthy of a better cause, we handed our ha'pennies over to Shabby, and Shabby explained to us every Sunday at the Sunday School, how securely and secretly he had locked the money away.

But for two important happenings, the club might still have been flourishing, instead of ending untimely as it did. Peter lost his piece of Stewart tartan ribbon from his button hole. We had none to replace it and he felt in consequence that his solemn obligations were no longer binding on him. The other happening takes more time in the telling.

With the approach of spring, we began to feel restless as March hares and mating sparrows. We calculated that there should be about four shillings and fourpence in Shabby's fiddlecase; far too much money to have lying in a box idle. None of us had ever been very far away from home, excepting "Alf-a-hinch," and the only things he could remember about it was that he saw nigger minstrels, lost his bonnet and had a bottle of ginger-beer all to himself. So we reasoned that we

might do worse on the spring holiday than take a trip on one of the Clyde steamers which sailed from the Broomielaw.

We knew that a half-return ticket to Rothesay, by boat direct, including the effluvia from Govan, Whiteinch, Renfrew, Dumbarton, and Port Glasgow, only cost ninepence. That would leave us with an ample margin for sundries, if we took sufficient bread and jelly with us to satisfy the clamours of hunger which would be sure to assail us every time we passed a restaurant door.

We decided to meet together to talk the matter over, but Shabby did not seem to take very kindly to this suggestion and tried his hardest to persuade us against improvidence.

"It is gey funny that you are a' so anxious to spend the money after we've had so much trouble gatherin' it up."

"Whose money is it, onyway?" I asked; and that seemed to quiet him down.

"Oh, weel, you can do what you like," he remarked, with a sigh of resignation.

Later on we gathered to discuss the project, and there was no sign of Shabby at the meeting. Some very uncomfortable misgivings began to take root and grow. A sickly, faintish feeling came over me as the first glimmer of suspicion crept in that my one shilling and a penny was *not;* probably never had been.

At every turn we tried to waylay Shabby; but whenever he caught sight of us, he would jump onto his bread van, lash his senile and semi-conscious horse and drive furiously away.

But Nemesis (or whoever the gentleman is who supervises the punishment department of our earthly existence) was on Shabby's track. One night we saw Shabby go through the close and up the stairs to his

home. "Alf-a-hinch" and I lurked at the rear end of the covered way, while Peter took up the post of danger at the front, awaiting Shabby's return.

After about three-quarters-of-an-hour's loitering, whisperings and false alarms, we heard him tramping down the stairs, apparently as unconscious as he was unsuspecting.

He was whistling "The Fairyland Waltz." I did not know then that it was "The Fairyland Waltz," but in later years, when I attempted to learn the violin, that was one of the first tunes my teacher gave me to trifle with, and it came back to me so vividly, with all its sickening associations and memories, that I declined to scrape a note of it. Even now, when I hear the innocent melody, a sense of loss and a feeling of emptiness takes hold of me.

We remained in hiding until Shabby was half way through the close, then we sprang out on him. And oh, joy of joys! how lucky we were! He had the bank with him; the fiddlecase was dangling at the end of his left arm.

"Hullo," he cried, with the cheerfulness of a French aristocrat on his way to the guillotine.

"Where are you going?" demanded Peter.

"It's nane o' your business, but I'm going for my fiddle lesson," answered Shabby.

"Weel, you had better open up your fiddlecase and gie us oor money."

"What money?" asked Shabby, in feigned innocence.

"What money!" screeched Peter. "Did you hear that, you yins? If that's no' a bricht yin." He was ablaze with anger. "Come on, nane o' your nonsense; open up the case and oot wi' the money, or it'll be the worse for you."

The budding Paganini began to hedge.

"I havena got the key. It is in my ither troosers."

"That's your ither troosers you hae on. Think we don't ken your Sunday breeks? Oot wi' the key, mister. You're likely to be going for a fiddle lesson wi' the case in your hand, locked, and the key up in the hoose in your ither troosers," retorted Peter, logically enough. "We're three to one, mind ye."

After some more jockeying, Shabby broke down and the truth was out, the truth that we really did not want to hear.

"I havena the money," he whined, in a quavering, repentant voice. "I spent it on fiddle-strings."

We stood, stricken and silent in the presence of this great calamity. Four shillings and fourpence on fiddle-strings! Ye Gods! Enough to keep the Scottish Orchestra in fiddle-strings for the balance of its natural life!

Peter was the first to recover, and without so much as looking at Shabby, he brushed past him and was half way up the stairs before the latter realised what he was about to do. He ran after Peter in great concern, catching him by the jacket sleeve.

"What are ye going to do?" he asked.

"Let go, you—you—embeezler. I'm going straight up to tell your mither and you ken what that means for you."

Shabby's mother had a reputation for uprightness, and for her to know of such a misdemeanour as her son had committed would be as much as poor Shabby's life would be worth.

"Aw, don't do that, Peter," he pleaded. "I ken I did wrang, but let me hae till Saturday and I'll gie you fellows the three shillings and threepence that belongs to you; ay, and a penny each extra. I'll do it at this very close-mooth at six o'clock, as sure as daith."

With a show of reluctance we agreed to give him the requested truce; and at the appointed time on the

Saturday we were there, waiting for Shabby and the money.

True to his promise, he paid us up to the last penny, and, as he mounted the stairs, like Martin Harvey in *The Only Way*, feeling that what he had done was a far, far better thing than he had ever done; but not quite so sure of what he should do next. He looked the picture of dejection.

We remained at the bottom of the stairs, for we anticipated a scene.

Shabby could not have been inside the house thirty seconds, when the door opened violently and he was precipitated on to the stair-head. He was expostulating and explaining, and between the sounds of the regular strokes of a strap on Shabby's back, his mother's shrill voice rang out, "I'll teach ye. Lost three and sixpence doon a stank, did ye? Three and sixpence oot o' five shillings! I'd like to ken what ye were doing wi' your wages in your hand, ower a grating. Tell me that, will ye? Tak' that—and that—and that, you big, witless gomeril."

It was music in our ears—the very best that we had ever heard played by Shabby—and it partly recompensed us for the trying ordeal through which we had gone.

But as Shabby seemed to be effecting his escape down the stairs, with his mother in close pursuit, getting in her licks on him where she could, we did not linger.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I

As a longing for more intellectual pursuits took hold, we gradually began to grow away from the ordinary diversions of the street.

We acquired a bent for joining societies and associations, senior if they would have us, but chiefly junior. The main thing was that they should accept us as members for nothing or next to it.

Our names emblazoned the rolls of the Bands of Hope in connection with four different churches, and doubtless would have swelled the lists of several more had it been possible for us to attend two or three meetings in one night.

We accumulated an interesting collection of pledge cards against smoking, drinking, gambling, swearing and every other known vice; we were ever ready to sign anything from a promissory note to a death warrant, always providing it did not entail the paying out of money. We had never smoked or gambled; we had not tasted liquor for the first time at five years of age, nor had we been roaring drunk at seven (like one biographer I read of), consequently an additional pledge here and there made no difference to our habitual temperance, while these opened the way for us to participate in just so many more of the treats offered by

the good-intentioned individuals as inducements to sign up.

We joined the juvenile society of Rechabites and paid dues into it at the exorbitant rate of a ha'penny a week. While there, we received our first initiation into the mysteries of closed doors, inner and outer guards, and all the who-goes-there business so dear to the hearts of most boys and not a few grown-ups. But the weekly teetotal lecture, the temperance songs, the temperance recitations and the stories told to us with temperance morals, grew monotonous; we became uneasy, restless, unruly and, finally, unmanageable. The result of this was that Peter was ejected for a misdeed of mine—the throwing of a piece of sucked orange at a little girl on the platform who, for the fourth time that month, was wrestling with "The Village Blacksmith."

I felt guilty, and cold, and lonely without Peter, so there and then I made up my mind to let all the weekly ha'pennies I had paid in to the society go by the board, and I joined him in the street.

II

In her anxiety to do some good to the children in the neighbourhood, the daughter of our clergyman started up what she called a Catechumen Class. This class foregathered every Monday evening in the vestry of the little Methodist Church, and Peter and I attended it for six nights, with sanctimonious regularity. However, our behaviour could not have been of the best, and the strain proved too much for all of us. The lady at last took Peter and me aside and talked to us. She was exceedingly nice about it. We took what she said in good part and parted quite friendly.

"You must not think, boys, that I am putting you out of the class," she said. "I just wish you to remain away for a time, until I get some assistance, as I feel I am not able to look after you as I ought."

In answer to our anxious inquiry, she promised to let us know when she would be able to have us back.

The policeman she intended getting to assist her must have disappointed her, for, so far, we have not heard from her.

Peter's father was a very pawky, sober elder, and my mother was a respected member, of that severely plain little church that stood at the top of the road. This meant that we boys had to attend services every Sunday morning and evening, besides the Sunday school in the afternoon.

It was a church where an enthusiastic "Hallelujah!" a devout "Praise the Lord!" and an ecstatic "Glory!" would punctuate and perforate the minister's sermons.

The "Pillars of the Kirk" were not in the least slow to pull the minister up if they got the idea that he was transgressing into politics or quoting anything that was in the slightest degree verging on the unorthodox.

In the stillness of a summer Sabbath morning, when the minister was in the midst of an impassioned discourse, I can remember Peter's father, with a face as solemn as an owl's, bursting into the minister's flowery eloquence like a clap of overhead thunder.

"Naw, naw, John," he cried, addressing the preacher, "you're wrang there. Surely you don't expect us a' to stamach that?"

"Of course," went on the preacher, as quietly and undisturbed as could be, well knowing his congregation, "what I have just said is merely my personal opinion."

That immediately stilled the storm better than anything else could have done, and the sermon was

continued as if nothing untoward had happened. And Peter's father, with an "Aw richt; on ye go," huddled himself in his seat quite satisfied.

Those old, honest, work-gnarled elders never were so much in their element as when lining the back platform behind the pulpit, at a Sunday-school soirée, ready and anxious to deliver the short address which was expected of each during the course of the evening; each address being sandwiched, for the sake of variety, between the songs and recitations of the pupils and the teachers.

Their orations invariably commenced with a humble apology for the speaker's presence on the platform, some remarks complimentary to the large attendance and the enthusiasm of the audience, and then would follow a few, hoary, grave-yard jokes, concluding with an exhortation, a confession, a death-bed scene, or an incident with a strong moral.

All the while, we would suffer the well-intentioned inflictions in a kind of comatose state, this state being occasioned by our having eaten anything from ten to fifteen pastries and cookies, washed down with half-a-dozen cups of tea, with the result that the pastries and cookies had swollen inside almost to bursting point.

The beadle—usually the most interesting individual in any Scots church—was, by ordinary occupation, what we termed a "dryland sailor." He was an engineer, or a greaser, or a stoker, or some such, on board one of the little steam *cluthas* which plied between the different wharves on the river Clyde. To judge from his verbiage, his knowledge of nautical matters was prodigious. He was never more pleased nor more obliging than when addressed as "Captain."

His whole nature might be summed up in one little incident.

He lived in a single-roomed house down a back lane. One evening a neighbour discovered his wife in the lane, dashing buckets and basins of water up against the outside of the window.

"My, what are ye doing, Bess?" she asked. "Hae ye gone daft?"

"Naw, naw," came the reply. "Don't mak' a noise. Tam's in bed, tryin' to get to sleep. You ken, ever since he sailed to Ameriky on yin o' yon Cunarders, four years ago, he has never been able to gang to sleep unless he hears the waves splashin' up against what he ca's the cabin window."

III

In the hope of arousing spiritually the lethargy of the community, the elders of our little church engaged the services of a revivalist for a three weeks' campaign. This evangelist was an earnest, God-fearing young man, with a large hook nose, a wild shock of hair and a voice like a thousand trumpets. His name was Harrison. He had a way of shooting truths at you that made you feel in two minutes that you were the vilest sinner on earth and that hell was too good a place for you.

Meetings were held every evening and packed to the door. Peter and I, although we were no more than twelve years old at that time, were given peremptory parental orders that we were to attend every service.

On the first night, in the first few minutes of the meeting, I felt instinctively drawn to this raw-boned revivalist, and before he was half way through with his address, I was crying like to break my heart. I felt guilty of every crime on and off the calendar, and I became more than anxious to escape with all possible speed from "the wrath to come," which I knew was in my wake. So, when the call was made for volunteers

to the penitent form, I struggled out to it along with old men and young women, and a goodly number of kids like myself, who were almost frightened to death. We weren't worrying ourselves about the delights of heaven; it was hell that was bothering us.

That Peter was perturbed at the turn of events is to put it mildly. He was waiting for me at the outer door, but I passed on with my eyes on the ground, for I was still wondering at the strange fizzing sensation that was going on in my internals. I had not yet decided whether it would be right or wrong for me to have anything more to do with so wicked and hardened a sinner as Peter, knowing him as I did.

He came after me and caught hold of my jacket.

"Are ye no' goin' to speak to me ony mair?" he asked, with concern.

"I'm no' right sure yet," I answered, like the silly little idiot I was.

"If that's the way o' it," he cried, "then, by jings! I'll get converted mysel' the morn's nicht."

And sure enough he did. But, what was more to the point, he was truly penitent for his fearful past and became so enthused in his new rôle that he outstripped me completely and made me appear a greater sinner, in comparison, than ever.

IV

For several months we attended every service and every open-air meeting that was held by our church people, and our efforts to be good and to refrain from slipping back into many of the little shady actions and expressions that had marked our past existence, were pathetic had they not been so ridiculous.

We formed a juvenile league for the moral support of one another, but this developed into a spying,

tattle-tale organisation, more than anything else. We used to go out into the country, maybe six of us, and when "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife," would hold a little meeting, singing and praying with all the fervour of Harrison himself (practising really), recounting our experiences like old sea-dogs, telling of our past misdeeds with sorrow, but all the time glorying openly in the fact that we had been such "devils." We talked of our daily temptations, as women do of their pet diseases and maladies, and we told of the wonderful resistances and the occasional lapses.

One of our number had been an inveterate smoker, having been in the habit (when he was in any way lucky in his gutter searches) of smoking at least one dozen cigarette-ends a day. Night after night he would tell us of his terrible craving for "just one puff," and of his bravery in passing up endless ends as they lay so temptingly on the street right under his nose, as if laid there by Satanic design. He generally admitted having succumbed at last to the fascinations of the weed, but, on expressing sorrow, we would condone the offence and urge on him to keep up the good work. He would then become as cheerful as if he had come straight out of a confessional.

One evening, however, "Dandy," as we had nicknamed him, came to us with an almost holy light in his eyes. He boasted that he had not smoked once during the entire day and expressed the belief that he had given the devil the slip at last. Unfortunately for his story, two of us had seen him that very day, smoking behind a dyke on the Cowglen Road. And so, the sin of lying was laid to his charge in addition to the less heinous one of smoking.

It was only natural that we should break away from such a worldling, and we did so, letting him know plainly that he was too bad ever to be good, and that

his "seven times" were up, for we had conceived the strange notion somehow that a Christian could only back-slide seven times, after that, he was hopelessly beyond redemption.

V

The enthusiasm was still kept up after the revivalist went away. Open-air meetings were held at the Fountain and marches were made up and down the street, almost in opposition to the Salvation Army. We reckoned we had a singing leader who could vie with the best of theirs. What his voice lacked in sweetness, it made up in volume. He sang with his hands, and his head, and his feet; every part of him seemed to participate in the melodious joy. He could walk backwards anywhere. Several times he was known to fall over some small boy who, knowing his weakness, had lain down behind him. On one particular occasion, he toppled into an excavation, but he simply picked himself up, without even looking to see what had caused the trouble, and continued singing without losing a beat in the measure.

But there was no antagonism between the Salvation Army and ourselves, and when we chanced to meet, as we came from opposite directions, one side would shut off steam, or else join in the same refrain that the other was struggling with, with an enthusiastic "Hallelujah, brothers!" from some friendly marcher as we passed.

An endeavour to enlighten the people in the wildest part of the town was projected. For this purpose, a ramshackle hall was rented every Saturday night, and to this place we resorted for song and testimony. To get to it we had to go down a side street, through a covered alley and up an outside iron stair. The hall

was situated above a bakehouse. The flooring boards were loose and broken, and a delicious but tantalising odour of hot pies used to waft up and filter through, filling the hall. During the course of a prayer, some very unparliamentary bakehouse language and some rather coarse bakehouse jests had the habit of filtering through also.

It was a humorously assorted admixture of humanity that foregathered in that hall; old, tottering men and women, smart young business men, pretty young ladies, and mere boys and girls, all filled with earnestness; men and women of all classes anxious to live anew; maudlin drunks who had a proneness for interrupting the speakers by going up to the front and weeping copiously all over the organ and the organist; besides the usual rowdies who came to be amused, just as they would go to a boxing match or a variety entertainment.

After the leader had said a few words by way of breaking the ice, the meeting would be thrown open for testimony.

Peter became quite a speaker, as did several of my companions. I never got to that somehow, and the result was that my companions did not consider that I was "quite right" in my conscience, that there must be some secret sin. But there wasn't, at least, not that I knew of.

All kinds of opportunities to acknowledge their sinfulness and turn over a new leaf were offered the attenders at our meetings, and many who took advantage of these still live to be thankful they did so.

One little man, who used to come every Saturday as regularly as did the owner of the hall for his one and sixpence rent, was the cause of a great deal of wasted energy and apparently unanswered prayer. He professed to be under deep conviction, and, one after

another, the kind-hearted, God-fearing men who conducted the meetings would wrestle on their knees with him at the front form, their arms round his neck and their voices full of entreaty. Whether he was in earnest about changing his mode of living and had not the courage to take the definite step, or simply enjoyed the fuss that was made over him and the little bit of temporary notoriety he was giving himself, I cannot say, but he never reached anywhere farther than the conviction stage all the time those meetings were held.

Another poor fellow, a carter, who had the unenviable reputation of being the most fluent user of foul language in the neighbourhood, got up one night to give his testimony after professing conversion. He stammered and spluttered as he struggled with his new way of talking King's English.

"I would like to mention the great change that has come ower me," he said. "My wife kens it, and she's as happy as a wee lassie. I hae stoppit swearin', an' my horse notices the difference and is fair dumfounert. Something happened to me last Sunday mornin,' an' if it had happened two or three weeks before, I would hae been cursin' and swearin' like a—like a—like a drunk carter. The fact is, I went oot to feed the hens. I was in my stockin' feet at the time, an' I'll be damned if I didna tramp on the jaggy end of a bloody broken ginger-beer bottle."

The silence that ensued was painful. It stopped his flow of oratory. He felt that there was something wrong. He flushed awkwardly as he tried to discover what he had said amiss. Then he dropped into his seat and hid his face in his hands, while big tears trickled between his fingers.

He came to the conclusion that it was useless for him to try any more. For a while after that, he stood in

great danger of falling back into his old ways, but his faithful new friends kept a close watch and a firm hand on him and he came through the ordeal a clean-tongued man. When I saw him last he was a respected citizen of the town and an upright member of the kirk.

VI

I recall still another individual of the garrulous type, who used the privilege of testimony for telling his family history and letting the people know incidentally what a *targe* of a wife he had. He used it too to describe his various ailments and to expound his pet theories. He always had us fidgeting and yawning long before he was half-way through. He had a most aggravating way of rousing hopes in our minds that he was just about to conclude, when he would start off again on a new tack, as fresh as ever. Men like him are to be found at every meeting. They like to do the talking for the crowd—insufferable bores all of them.

This fellow's unexpected downfall was the cause of momentary consternation and a considerable amount of amusement, but it elicited little or no commiseration for his loss of dignity.

He was in the midst of a long-winded harangue when, without the slightest warning, there was a crash and a splintering of wood, and his voice became stilled right in the middle of a five-syllabled word.

The flooring boards under his feet had given way and our talkative friend had disappeared up to the armpits, with his legs dangling through the roof of the bakehouse. The bakers came up at a run thinking their workshop was falling about their ears. The meeting was hastily brought to a close with prayer. All hands went to the rescue, and it was only with

the utmost difficulty that the unfortunate, would-be rhetorician was extricated.

It could easily be seen that what was this man's fate might be the fate of any of us; and this, with the advent of the summer, put an end for the time being to our missionary work.

Gradually the excitement wore off and we cooled down to normal. Peter and I were never quite so fervent nor so well to the forefront of any of the future revival movements, but, nevertheless, the impression made by that fiery, towsy-headed Harrison has not entirely disappeared, and he may have been a greater factor for good in my life than I have ever been willing to give him credit for.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I

THE years were running fast and the days of our schooling seemed to be numbered. The mental earth had been turned over, and the seeds of English, Latin, French, German and mathematics had been strewn, to be picked up by the birds of the air, to be choked by the thorns and weeds, or to grow and bring forth fruit, according to the nature of the soil and the surrounding conditions.

Every day another boy would be missing from his usual form, to return no more. The great world had claimed him for her prey and had swallowed him up. It looked as if Peter and I must follow, for there was need at home, as there was in most of the homes in that little town, of the few shillings that a boy could earn weekly.

As a matter of course, more than anything else, we entered for the annual bursary competition, which was open to the boys and girls of the four schools under the Board who had already passed a certain grade; and greatly to the astonishment of ourselves and our relatives, our names were among those of the twelve successful competitors.

The bursaries we had won carried with them a quarterly cash payment to each holder and were tenable for two years. The amount was small, but sufficient

to determine our parents on keeping us at school for yet a while longer.

What a boon bursaries were, and must still be, to the boys and girls of country towns who want the education but whose parents can't afford to be without the money they might be earning!

The pity is there aren't more of them.

The results of this competition were made public just before the summer holidays and I was fortunate in receiving a strong invitation from a married sister to spend a week or two with her at Lanark, as a means of recuperation after my supposedly severe mental exertions, although the only exertion I could remember was the football game we got up in the playground, during the intervals between the various examination papers, which necessitated our master sending us out to wash our hands and faces before we dared touch another sheet of clean paper.

When I got to Lanark, there was a fine silver watch awaiting me, as a present from my sister's husband. In a few days more, a silver chain, with a rampaging lion stamped on every link, arrived for me from my brother in England. In his letter, he explained how pure the silver was. He had gone into the best jewellers' in town and they had put the chain on one side of the scales, while he had to put a sufficient number of shillings on the other to turn the balance, then he had to pay two shillings and sixpence more to cover the cost of manufacture—all before the chain became his property.

Later on, in an argument with Peter as to its probable worth, we got the grocer to repeat the performance on his scales, and that chain's reputation went up at a bound, for we discovered that it must have cost my brother nine shillings and sixpence in cold, glittering currency.

On my return from Lanark, I was further delighted to find that my round of pleasure was not yet over. Another married sister, who had rented a cottage for a month on the sandy shores of Ayrshire, at a quiet little place not far from West Kilbride, expressed a strong desire to have me with her family for a time. She sent the money to cover the cost; so, needless to say, I made the journey. And all that month I ran about, wild and unfettered, over the green hills, through the fields, along the sands and among the rocks, bathing at all hours of the day in the health-giving briny waters, among crabs and flounders and whelks, living in an entirely new world.

I was fed as I had never been fed before, with a bewildering variety of wholesome foods and a sufficiency to satisfy the tremendously increased cravings of a tremendously voracious appetite.

It was the first real change I had had in all my life, and I enjoyed it to the full, with only one misadventure during all that wonderful month.

II

An old fisherman made for me a harpoon-like spear, fixed at the end of a long pole, purposely for the sport of impaling flounders.

The son of the owner of the adjoining cottage was also the proud possessor of a flounder spear, so we joined forces, discarded our already scant raiment and waded into the water at the turn of the tide, up to our chests, in search of fish.

My companion was an old hand at the game and he hauled up flounder after flounder at the end of his pole in quick succession.

I followed his operations very carefully, and before long I had the theory of the thing down pretty fine.

My greater trouble was in spotting flounders at the bottom among the sand, for my country-bred eyes were not accustomed to penetrating the restless waters, with the sunshine shimmering in slanting, quivering lines through the opalescent depth to the yellow sands below.

At last I got my eye on a fish as it lay, with its brown back showing, quite near to my companion.

"Don't move or turn," I whispered to him excitedly. "Keep as still as a mouse. There's a fine, big flounder just beside you."

He was almost as anxious as I was that I should have something to show for my endeavours, so he hardly breathed as I took careful aim and plunged my spear into the object with all the force I could muster.

I struck it fair in the centre. A most awful howl from my fellow fisher strangled the feelings of elation that were just being born within me. He shrieked again and again, and a red dye rose to the surface of the water.

I had mistaken his bare foot for a flounder and had driven my spear well in.

I was too helpless with fright to do anything, and my one thought was that he would die and I would be in fresh trouble.

His cries brought assistance and he was helped home.

What a relief it was when I was informed that he would be out playing again in a day or two and would not even have to have his leg cut off.

When the school took up again, Peter and I were transferred to the Board's newest and grandest seat of learning, and there we were re-introduced to German, French and mathematics, and initiated into the mysteries of electricity and chemistry. For chemistry a real, live professor was engaged to instruct us, but we proved terrible dullards and as soon as this professor took us beyond H_2SO_4, he had us beyond our depth, going

down for the third time, shouting for help and struggling for our very lives. Some thirty of us were sent forward to the Society of Arts examination in Chemistry, but out of the lot only one was recorded as having passed; and that one was neither Peter nor I.

At the end of the session, however, we presented ourselves once more at the annual scholarship competition. All who had previously gained lesser honours were eligible to compete only for the first and second places, which carried with them twice the amount of the other bursaries and were tenable for a further period of two years.

To quote an old saying, "The deil's aye guid to his ain," Peter and I had the pleasure of finishing in the two foremost places, so we couldn't have been quite the fools that others had almost succeeded in making us think we were because of our love of fun and mischief.

But all the old faces were vanishing, or had already vanished from the midst of us, and younger scholars were coming up and filling their places. In one year more we reached the end of the curriculum of the academy and, unless it were our intention to take up teaching as a profession or attend the university and terminate by wagging our heads in some country pulpit, we saw there was nothing for us to do but to launch ourselves on the mighty ocean of commerce.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

I

It was with a strange variety of sensations that I walked from the school gate for the last time. There was a nervous anxiety for the future which stretched so far and vaguely in front of me; there was a wild, fanciful ambition, with a buoying hope of unqualified success; sorrow to leave the old, happy, careless life was there, also a kindly, thankful feeling for those who had been patient and painstaking in their endeavours to lead me on the way to progress. But over all this there flowed a smooth gladness of freshly acquired liberty.

I had loved my work at school at all times, I had tried my best to excel; I had, in fact, excelled; yet, in a lesser degree, I had come under the ban of the grinning ghost which invaded our school, as it did many others, terrorising us and frightening us into a begrudged obedience, an obedience which love and sympathy and kindness and a little endeavour to understand exuberant youthfulness could have won for themselves, unbegrudged and unasked.

From the day I entered school for the first time until the day I left it, I never could shake off the feeling that there was something sordid, something unspeakably mean, something damnably cruel in the manner in which we children were handled. We were at the absolute mercy of those who taught us, many of whom were tyrants and cowards. The chastisements our instructors inflicted on us were, at many times, unfair and brutally excessive.

Often I used to wonder, when the lash was being administered, were these teachers ever boys and girls themselves.

In the memoir of those diligent, self-made men, William and Robert Chambers, reference is made to the severity of the punishments served out by the schoolmasters and teachers to the pupils in their charge at the beginning of last century; and a hope is expressed in that book that such treatment belonged to the days that had gone and was not now being administered at the enlightened period at which that memoir was written.

It is unfortunate but true that greater harshness was displayed and greater cruelties than are narrated by Mr. Chambers were inflicted every day in the year 1890, and it is very much a question if the same state of matters does not still exist in many of the country schools of Scotland.

Evil habits die hard.

The world has harboured tyrants since the beginning of time; doubtless it will go on producing and nourishing them till the crack of doom.

Nowhere can a tyrant thrive and vent his petty spleens so well as behind the closed doors of school classrooms in country places.

I found it so. And we no more thought of complaining at home than we did of telling the teacher that he did not thrash us half enough. Our complaints, if made, would scarcely have been listened to. Besides, we had the happy, childlike faculty for forgetting pain the moment it was gone. We never thought that we had any recourse. We considered the teacher more omnipotent than our parents. His was the last word; his the final and unalterable decision. The fact is, we were up against the laws of the Medes and Persians; we were slaves, every one of us, under the lash all day and every day: and the pity of it was that we were just

little exuberant youngsters. God forgive some of those teachers: but it is hard for me to do so.

That some of them were kind and considerate, even when sorely tried, is true, but that a great many of them were despots and tyrants and in consequence were not qualified to handle children, is also true.

I have seen boys and girls—particularly boys—thrashed and knocked about (I have been thrashed and knocked about myself) for some trivial offence not worth a moment's thought—sometimes for the offence of another—by men and women flushed or blanched by a riot of rage and hardly aware of what they were doing; certainly not in any fit state of mind to be administering chastisement.

Often has my memory harped back to the scenes of injustice and harshness that froze my youthful blood then; and that now, in the maturity of years, have made it boil.

I recall a lady teacher, one whom we feared more than we revered, for never did she display a glimmer of that gentleness of nature which is credited to her sex. A great, dull, stupid boy was on the floor, a boy who was born dull, I expect, and remained so during all the years he schooled with me. For one long hour he was thrashed with a wooden ruler, first on one hand and then on the other (and smacked across the face at intervals with the teacher's open hand), until both his hands were numb, red and swollen, until the teacher panted unevenly from her exertions and the violence of her uncontrolled temper, and all because a dull boy failed to grasp some simple point in arithmetic which was plain to her and fairly clear to the most of us.

I often wonder if it ever occurred to her that there were possibly seventy scholars in that room watching her every action, sizing her up and forming an opinion of her that would never alter; seventy scholars, the

majority of whom would grow to be men and women and who, remembering the days of their youth, would blame her for some of their own short-comings, inasmuch as they were under her care and guidance at the most impressionable age, and considered that what she did was always right and that by following her example with those who, in turn, would be in their power, they would be living up to the best they knew. Of course, she wouldn't think of that—she was just a little, bad-tempered woman who would have been none the worse of a touch or two of the stick herself to bring her to her senses.

Again, I pictured a mere girl in her teens, a pupil-teacher fresh from the scholar stage herself, fresh from suffering as we suffered, not then invested, I take it, with the right to administer corporal punishment, but taking the liberty to the full extent of her capabilities, for well she knew there would be no protest.

How she loved to have the doors shut and to be alone with us! How she gloried in that first taste of power! What a parade of authority she made as she screeched and thundered, stamped her feet and beat her desk! How she seemed to delight in smashing our little knucklebones with her pointer or her ruler, and what a pleasure it seemed to give her to smack the backs of our hands until the little blue veins stood out!

Maybe she did not realise the significance of it all; but then she was old enough to know, and if she did not know, then by no right should she have been filling a position fraught with such responsibilities.

I can remember on another occasion being forced with others in the class to witness the brutal treatment of one of our playmates and yet unable to raise a voice in protest in the fear that a similar punishment would be ours.

It was a raw October day. We came into the classroom, merry and boisterous, from the playground.

Our teacher, for the time being, was a male assistant, an importation, forbidding of countenance and unfamiliar. It was his first week among us. His beady eye lighted on a piece of rubber piping which protruded from the pocket of a little, shivering, bare-legged ragamuffin of a boy as he passed to his seat. He peremptorily ordered the piping to be placed upon his desk. The order was obeyed and the matter apparently ended there.

But as the lesson proceeded, Barelegs got into difficulties and was on the floor once more. He was punished on the hand with a ruler. In the heat of his boyish temper, he muttered as the stroke stung. Just a word it was, unintelligible to the teacher, unintelligible to us, no doubt unintelligible to the boy himself; but it was enough to start the conflagration.

With black madness, the teacher seized the rubber piping from his desk and thrashed the trembling little wretch, again and again, over his half-frozen legs and arms, raising a blue weal at every stroke and sending a clinging chill over the classroom, a chill that became intensified at every blow. He dared his victim to raise a single cry upon the pain of added punishment. With his strong right arm and the rubber tube he subdued the unruly creature. He evidently knew from past experience how to quell refractory spirits in boys.

But this man proved just a little too clumsy in his work for even a country school. That was one time there must have been a complaint, for we never saw his face in the classroom again. He passed from our lives like the evil dream he was.

In close association, there was another, hard of heart and sour of temper, yet doubtless a loving husband and a fond father in his own home. An ordinary, flat, leather strap, with three or four fingers, was not lash enough with which to keep children of eleven years of age

in order. A long, hard piece of harness, a quarter of an inch thick, was what he used. And he had the wielding of it down to a science. That writhing snake of a horror would curl round our hands so that the full force of the blow would fall on the tender backs of them.

I wonder if he fancied we put his cunning down merely to accident. If so, he erred. We boys were not so easily fooled or hoodwinked. But what a perverted satisfaction he must have had, if he obtained any by his cruelties!

Scenes similar to these come up before me in countless numbers. They were then part of our daily existence. We looked for punishment as naturally as we looked for our daily bread. So saturated were we with the idea that when we "played school," the one chosen as teacher spent nine minutes out of every ten in administering mock chastisement to his erstwhile pupils.

II

Most clear in my memory are the cruelties that were perpetrated on us in the name of education during a season when, from the continual changing of our teachers and the consequent differences in their methods of teaching, more than from stupidity on our part, we fell behind in our geography studies. The annual examination was close at hand, and, no matter what the cost, the necessary percentage of passes had to be made in order to obtain the Government grant for the board. We were hopelessly in arrears when the head-master took us in hand. Day after day, he demonstrated how geography of the world, with its islands and peninsulas, its mountains, its rivers and tributaries, its bays and oceans, and its towns and their industries could be driven into the thick skulls of a backward class in short time.

In his right hand he grasped a thin, flexible, bamboo cane, something that had been whispered about with bated breath before his coming, having travelled ahead of him; something we never saw or felt until his coming; something we never saw again after he left us; a Chinese horror of a torture-instrument, a relic of barbarism which, I hope, as Mr. Chambers hoped so many years before, has been consigned to the dark ages to which it belongs, although of this last "I hae my doots." With this damnable thing the master thrashed us unmercifully for the slightest slip in our memory work till we screamed with the pain of it.

As if it mattered in a child's lifetime whether the Volga was in Russia or South America and whether it ran north or south, for all one would have to do later on in life, if he wanted to know, would be to turn up an atlas. He would probably have to do it in any case, for he would long have forgotten nine-tenths of what he memorised then.

The noticeable uneasiness that invaded our classroom at the master's entrance, the long line on the floor—generally half of the entire class—all awaiting punishment after he had been with us half an hour, the sighs of relief from those left when they discovered, so much to their own surprise, that they had guessed their part correctly; these signs might have informed a less intelligent man than he that the cold-blooded brutality of his method was the cause of more failures with nervous children than passes of lazy ones. But it did not suit his purpose; he had a certain amount of driving work to do within a certain time to satisfy the Government inspectors, and the lash was all he could think of for the job.

The canker of it! It happened over thirty years ago and I haven't been able to forgive him yet.

When he left us for greater honours, he discarded his cane, and in so doing he proved his wisdom as well

as his knowledge of the meanness of his practice; for the wielding of a cane would hardly have gone down with the parents of the scholars he went to teach; they were a little higher up the social scale and complaints from his new scholars were more apt to carry weight than from their poorer neighbours.

Yet that same gentleman, and in every other way he was a thorough gentleman, could hold us spellbound and breathless when he cared to tell us an historical story of the defence of Leonidas and his five thousand Spartans at the Pass of Thermopylæ, or of the taking of Edinburgh Castle by the Black Douglas and his small following of daring highlanders.

Doubtless by this time he has forgotten a little, fat fellow with a glib tongue—alas, now silenced for ever—whom he struck on the side of the head with the flat of his hand and with all the fury and force he could muster: a grown man attacking a boy who dared not put up a hand to defend himself. The sound of that blow rang out like a pistol shot and sent a seethe of indignation over the entire class. With the violence of that blow he sent the boy sprawling on to the floor and under the seats several yards away; and all because he failed to solve a problem in algebra to the master's satisfaction.

That that boy's hearing might have been impaired for life was not taken into consideration for a moment. It was hardly a noble or a manly example to set a crowd of growing boys. It possibly struck the master in this way finally, for we did not see the end of the affair. The boy was carried out to the master's room, to closed doors, and the last we saw was a little, outraged body fighting and struggling every inch of the way.

How cowardly and odious it all seems now! It is hateful even to write about it, but maybe even at this date it may prevail on some teachers to stay their hand and substitute for the birch a little kindness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

I

THROUGH newspaper advertisements, I obtained a position in the office of a stockbroker, at a salary of twelve pounds a year; and in long trousers and a bowler hat, feeling more like a Guy Fawkes effigy than a budding man, I started out on my new duties.

When I set foot in the Stock Exchange for the first time, bewildered by the yelling and shouting and frantic gesticulations of hundreds of brokers and accredited clerks, as they hurled stocks and shares at one another, I remarked to my escort, as the old Scots elder did when he first viewed the inside of McLeod's waxwork, "My, but this is an awfu' place."

I was speedily initiated into the intricacies of stamp licking, letter copying, envelope addressing; Carry-over Days, Settlement Days and Bank holidays, and on quiet days I was introduced to solitaire, ha'penny nap and tossing for chocolate and pies, a penny a time, sudden death.

On account of the insecurity of my financial position, I was merely an interested spectator in regard to the ha'penny nap and the tossing for pies, but I managed to extract all the excitement and thrills of these vices by attaching myself to one of the clerks and following the fortunes of his stakes with bated breath and palpitating heart, imagining for the moment that his

stakes were my very own, cheering loudly when I won, and drooping with despondency when *I* lost.

After about a year of what I considered wasted time, I became uneasy and decided upon a change.

I had heard that carpenters, after a paltry five years' apprenticeship, could earn ninepence ha'penny an hour. On working this out at fifty-four hours a week as it was then, I could see before me a weekly wage of two pounds, two shillings and ninepence. I did not know of any office clerks who earned anything like that sum at twenty years of age, so I fancied that carpentry was the only work for me.

I had also a romantic notion that I would like to be a war-correspondent, dashing off thrilling descriptions and "seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth," an unappeased notion which still sneaks round in the dark recesses of my brain, for I never had enough money to be able to see all I wanted of this world.

Nothing matured from either of these desires. My mother pointed out to me, very convincingly, that because a carpenter could get ninepence ha'penny an hour, it did not follow that he earned two pounds, two shillings and ninepence a week, so all ideas of following the "Holy calling" were abandoned.

Although I scanned the newspapers diligently, I failed to find that war correspondents at the age of fifteen were required in any great numbers, and so, for lack of demand, that desire had to be temporarily smothered.

Now, it so happened that when Peter left school he took service with a steam ship company engaged in the coasting trade, and he used to talk to me about captains and stevedores, about cargoes, and holds, and hatches, with a glib familiarity that made me jealous; and on top of this, when he went off for his first summer holidays, he got a free trip to Belfast on

one of his company's boats. Not only that, but his ticket bore the mysterious words, "All Found." When he explained to me that "All Found" was the nautical term for ham and eggs, fish, chops, soups, meat and potatoes, desserts, salads, fruits, biscuits and cheese, and tea with loaf sugar, it settled my career; I knew that there was only one calling in all the world that I was suited for and that was not stock-broking.

For six whole days, at the cost of sixpence, I subscribed to *The Glasgow Herald*, and I wrote for every vacant position in its columns that mentioned the magic words, "Steam Ship."

I succeeded at last in convincing a steam ship owner that he might possibly be able to extract eighteen pounds' worth of work out of me during the year to follow, and from that moment I had no more time for ha'penny nap or for any other kind of napping. It was hard work and plenty of it from then on.

I hustled from the office to the quay, and from the quay to the office, half a dozen times a day; I chased up my mate's receipts and shipping bills; I rushed out with telegrams; I tore forward and backward answering telephones and I filled and numbered bundles and bundles of unending correspondence and papers.

I chafed around the Custom House counters for hours on end, endeavouring to attract the attention of the gentlemen behind them, as they discussed golf, or ludo, or some other mild dissipation, my ultimate object being to pay the outstanding light bills and harbour dues. I inwardly rebelled at the time I had to waste with these officials and at the foolish idea men in general seemed to have that boys are never in a hurry, for I knew that in the office awaiting my return would be some five or six hundred letters which had to be ground through a copying device built on the lines of a barrel organ; that envelopes had to be addressed for every one of

these letters and that these envelopes had to be licked, and thumped, and stamped, then posted, possibly at the train, before my duties would be over for the night.

II

There was one boy my junior in that office for whose mistakes, as well as my own, I was held solely responsible. This boy had been engaged a month or so before me and he stood a head taller. With these moral and physical advantages, he presumed and imposed on me for a week or two, until I landed him on the chin and cut the back of his head against the sharp woodwork of a door. This retaliation I found necessary for my very existence, as I had troubles enough of my own to contend with from other sources. I was bossed by the junior clerk, who in turn was bullied by his immediate senior. None was independent, from the meanest to the greatest. Each, like the Apostle Paul, was afflicted by at least one "thorn in the flesh," while the juniors and office boys were assailed by thorns on all sides. We were at the beck and call of everybody. More than anything else, the whole system resembled a modern House that Jack Built.

This is the Boss of the Office Staff,
Who frowns at the Cashier's hearty laugh.
The Cashier of his pleasure shorn,
Badgers the Book-keeper, tired and worn,
Who drubs the Canvasser, doing his best,
Whose tongue from the Rates Clerk takes no rest,
Who grills the man to the Manifest bound,
With two days' work in his daily round,
Who fancies himself no worse than his betters
And spumes his spleen on the Writer of Letters.
The latter growls at a ledger blot,

Spying for errors where they are not.
The man thus blamed for wrong amounts,
Accuses the Keeper of Freight Accounts.
Thus down the line the trouble speeds,
Pouring wrath on the junior's deeds;
And he in turn calls down the boys
For little work and plenty noise.
And so their jars of grump they quaff,
From Boss to Boy of the Office Staff.

Promotion among young men and youths of the offices was rapid in those days. New faces appeared and, in time, became familiar as they took the places of those who left us. With each new face I attained an added sense of seniority and I seemed to be making such extraordinary progress that I had visions of owning that entire steam ship company some day, as I had had once before regarding a certain grocery business.

Yet I perceived that the older heads of the establishment were not given to making changes with any frequency; in fact, they remained, day in and day out, year after year, punctilious in service, at the same desk and doing the same kind of work, as if wedded or fettered to their jobs.

"Fettered," what a silly word to use! Why, I never thought of that in those days. I put it all down to their apparent satisfaction with their condition, and I concluded that they were so comfortably off that they never entertained the slightest thought of giving up their positions; and I envied them accordingly.

I did not understand then, but it became clear to me later, when I also stood in danger of becoming a "fixture," a mere spoke in the wheels of some other man's enterprise, that there was a deep and maybe a pathetic reason for the limpetlike tenacity with which they clung to their jobs.

But I am running ahead, for at that period of my life I was happy and contented in my new sphere. I loved the bustle, the rush and the splendid variety; I loved to see big things done and to help modestly in the doing of them. I strove to do my given tasks as well as I knew how. I was anxious; I was ambitious. I was willing to make sacrifices of time and of energy in the hope of advancement. Doubts of success and fears of failure never once arose to dim the vision of triumphal progress.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

I

THROUGHOUT the long, dreary winter, I never lost sight of the coming summer, with its two weeks' holiday and its free trip on one of the company's steamers. I was in a state of fever all the time to ascertain for myself if "All Found" really meant all that Peter had said it did. I feared that the time of elucidation would never arrive; but it drew near at last.

What elaborate plans Peter and I made! We wore out two pairs of shoes, and we became contemptuously familiar with every highway and byway for miles around, as we sought solitude and made arrangements for our wonderful trip.

Peter was to spend his first week at home, then he was to travel by his company's boat to Belfast.

I was going farther afield, and I did not fail to impress on Peter the great advantages and privileges my company afforded its staff in comparison with his. My destination was the distant south of England, and at the end of my first week, when the boat was on its return voyage, I was to disembark at Belfast and make for a certain seaside resort, by a certain train, and Peter would be at the station awaiting me, with all arrangements completed for our board and lodgings for the week.

Struggling alongside a large leather travelling bag (the borrowed property of an obliging brother-in-law) gripping my free pass with "All Found" standing out

all over it, and jingling twenty-five shillings in my pocket, I stepped aboard at Glasgow, while the dock labourers were still rushing along the gang-planks with trucks, and the ship's winches were lowering great slings of merchandise into the rapacious holds.

A steward met me at the gangway, relieved me of my baggage, showed me into a state-room specially reserved for me, made me feel that at long last I was really and truly somebody, then left me to my own devices.

It was late at night and I was tired out with the excitement of anticipation, so, after hanging negligently over the port rail for an hour, I retired to my berth.

When I awoke, it was morning. A bell was clanging violently outside my cabin door. The sun was streaming in at the port-hole, and on looking out I could see water and sky, water and sky, alternately. From the throbbing of the engines and the swinging sensation of the steamer, I knew we were out at sea.

I sprang from my berth and dressed myself, feeling fit, and as hungry as a deserted cat on its seventh day in an empty house.

The steward showed me to the dining-room, the captain greeted me cordially, and my fellow passengers smiled and endeavoured to put me completely at my ease.

I seized the menu and surveyed it anxiously. Sure enough!—there were fish, ham and eggs, and chops for breakfast, with tea, coffee and cocoa, just as Peter had represented.

For a start, I shot an order of chops over my shoulder to the soldierlike steward who stood behind my chair, imitating, as well as I could, the big, strong man-of-the-world who sat opposite me. While I waited the execution of my order, I amused myself by looking through the cabin port-holes, watching the sky and the sea change places with rhythmical regularity.

The air seemed chilly, but I put that down to our

being out on the water. I watched, with a sense of irritation, the coarse way in which my big neighbour devoured his food. The brusque, hearty voice of the captain ruffled me. There was something in the atmosphere that I did not like. I brushed away a clammy moisture from my brow with my handkerchief.

The steward arrived and placed two large steaming chops under my nose. They were juicy, with a nice thick edging of solid fat. I always was fond of fat, and I was surprised at the steward's intuition. But somehow I did not feel so extraordinarily hungry after all; not nearly so hungry as I had imagined I should be. I toyed with my knife, then I pushed my fork into the fat. The sky through the port-hole changed with the water, then the water ran into the sky. The hot grease oozed out of the chop and trickled thickly over my plate. I watched it dreamily for an instant. It was very large, then it dwindled away in the distance until it seemed just a speck between me and the man opposite who was also a long way off. I rose hurriedly and staggered for the companionway, with unkind sniggerings drumming in my ears.

Two days and two nights I lay and tossed, and moaned and groaned in my berth, wishing I might die suddenly out of hand or that the boat would founder with all hands; wishing the cook's pantry with its odours was somewhere farther away from my state-room and that the passengers would not be so boisterous over their meals.

What irony it was, as I thought of my "All Found" ticket going to wreck and ruin! I inwardly cursed at Peter for having failed to tell me all.

Not until we reached our farthest destination in the south; not until the boat was tied secure and tight to dry land, did I venture out, pale-faced and wobbly-legged, with my clothes hanging limply on my wasted frame.

A pleasant saunter in a strange city had a soothing effect on my sadly jumbled internals and before long I began to feel quite bright and positively hungry.

I got back to the boat in time for dinner and I ordered everything to eat that I could think of, with an undignified haste in case I should fail to catch my fickle appetite at the flood. But there was no need for hurry; my appetite remained at flood from then on.

Never before had I devoured such meals as I did on that return trip.

At every dinner I attacked the menu card, starting at soup and finishing at biscuits and cheese; nothing escaped, not even the slightest little side dish; and if anything particular tickled my palate, I had no compunction in ordering a second helping. I had no more fear that I would walk out of my clothes. They fitted me once more, all round, with comfort. "All Found" had redeemed itself: it was not, after all, so empty and miserable a term as I had commenced to imagine it.

I was almost sorry when I walked ashore at Belfast.

II

Several hours later I reached my destination and I looked about for Peter. For a time I looked in vain. My heart had almost failed me when I espied him. How well I then understood the joy which Stanley must have felt when he fell in with Livingstone at Ujiji. But such feelings did not seem to be surging in Peter. He was at the bookstall at the front of the railway platform, resplendent under a straw hat with a flaring hat-band, leaning on a cane and talking easily to some girls with plaited hair who were dressed in white frocks and bedecked with gaudy ribbons, like prize horses at a fair. He was all oblivious of his reasons for being at

the station, and evidently quite unaware that the train had arrived.

This was so very unlike Peter that I felt hurt and indignant.

The young ladies with him were, of course, strangers to me. I wondered how Peter had got to know them, and how he could have acquired the nerve to be talking to them so pleasantly and at his ease, because he and I had always had more than a sneaking contempt for girls, chiefly on account of the fact that they were so self-possessed.

I went up awkwardly, feeling like a country bumpkin in my cap, low collar and black, travel-stained boots.

He did not make any move to introduce me, but said a few words to the girls and led me away with what I fancied rather unnecessary haste, as if he'd rather the girls didn't get a good look at me.

"You're a terrible toff, Peter," I remarked, a little dryly.

"Ay, and you've got to be down here, or you are out of it completely. Come on and get a straw hat, and some high collars, and brown boots. There's a good shop up the street. They're not very dear, and it makes an awful difference in the looks of a person. And, don't forget to speak polite."

With Peter and me, speaking "polite" meant speaking in day-school, copy-book English.

I could not understand what had caused this change in Peter, but I had to admit that he looked greatly improved by the additions he had made to his toilet; and as I was already a bit ashamed of my contrasted appearance, I allowed myself to be led by him to the door of a large gents' furnishing establishment.

I entered that place a callow youth and I emerged therefrom, fifteen minutes later, a man. And the change was effected for the modest sum of ten shillings and

sixpence ha'penny, expended on a pair of noisy tan shoes, a straw hat, some high collars, a fancy tie and a cane.

Peter regained his old good humour and started off with great gusto to expound the beauties of the place and its summery attractions.

"But what about lodgings, Peter?" I asked, in my best English.

"Lodgings! We've the best lodgings in town. Mrs. McQuirk's. Her man is a coalman. We've a fine room to ourselves; we get three meals a day and a jug of milk and biscuits before going to bed. And all for ten shillings a week, each," he rattled on, so "polite" that I could hardly understand him. I knew, however, that he would soon tire of that.

The prospect looked alluring and the terms suited my depleted exchequer, so I congratulated Peter on his good judgment.

The lady of the house was at the door to welcome me and was, incidentally, dispatching her four-year-old son and heir out to play on the roadway. This sturdy offspring had a bottle of milk tucked under his arm and was pulling vigorously at it, through a rubber tube. Three times during the first hour I was there he came back to get the bottle replenished and three times he went back to play, with his glass reservoir under his arm, fully charged.

The good lady had taken a fancy to Peter on sight, because she thought he resembled her young brother who had got into some trouble and had run away to be a soldier. Peter and I made the most of this and were rewarded accordingly.

I suggested to Mrs. McQuirk that we pay her in advance for our board, but she would not hear of such a thing.

"Time enough to pay," she said, "when you get what you are going to pay for."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

I

"YOUR chum was telling me you were powerful good at killing hens," Mrs. McQuirk went on, casually, just after I had finished a first, hearty meal in her house.

Peter was always a great boy for talking nonsense, and was inclined at times to oversing my praises, but never before had I heard of him narrating any imaginary exploits of mine in regard to hen-killing, and, truth to say, I never had had any intimate knowledge of hens further than knowing that they were responsible for eggs and that they made good eating when cooked. But that did not perturb me, for I merely presumed that Mrs. McQuirk, in her endeavours to be affable, had lighted on this piece of Peter's gratuitous falsifications and was using it on me as a means of conversation.

Modestly enough, I admitted to her that I had done considerable hen-killing in my younger days, but that of late I had become a bit rusty on the art from lack of practice. She seemed deeply interested, so I began to enlarge on the subject, demonstrating to her how the hen should be held, how its neck should be pressed slowly downward, then jerked backward quickly—and all would be over.

"It is fine to be able to turn your hand to different things," said Mrs. McQuirk. "Now, my man, Barney, would sooner die than tramp on a blackbeetle. I'm

the same way myself, but then killing isn't a woman's work, at all, at all."

She was silent for a second, then I was beginning to flatter myself that I had got rid of the subject rather nicely. But she started in again.

"Maybe ye wouldn't be above twistin' the necks of two hens I bought at the market this morning? They're in a crate in the yard. I wanted Mr. Peter to do it, but he said there need be no hurry whatever, for ye were so clever at it."

In that instant, I could see how I had foolishly fallen into a trap from which I could not very well extricate myself: and I may say, after Peter vented an unsympathetic chuckle, I made no effort to do so. The fact is, I almost succeeded in making him believe that I had some special fowl experience of which he was unaware.

I informed Mrs. McQuirk that I would be delighted to do any small service of that nature for her, but, if she did not mind, I would leave it over till next morning.

I was annoyed at Peter for getting me into this fresh trouble; but annoyance did little good—no one's ever did with Peter.

At intervals during that long night, I woke, always in the midst of a deadly combat with hens. At daybreak, I became as restless and nervous as a man on the morning of his hanging, so I resolved to be plagued by my thoughts no longer, but to get the job over before anyone was up.

I rose quietly and went downstairs and into the pantry, where the crate of hens had been put for safety overnight. I rolled up my sleeves, grabbed the more docile looking of the two birds and went through all the motions of "thrappling," just as I had described them to Mrs. McQuirk the day before.

The hen hardly fluttered: its head flopped over limply and I tossed it aside into a corner.

Easy work! So easy that I smiled. The theory and the practice were similar.

I caught up the other hen from the crate, where it was cowering with more than human premonition of impending doom. I went through the same motions again, but I did not seem to get the proper hold this time. The more I tugged, and pulled, and twisted, the more frantically the hen fluttered and struggled. For some minutes I tried to dispossess it of its bounding vitality. Perspiration began to run over my nose. I now detested the work I had in hand, and my stomach was beginning to revolt. To make matters worse, I heard a noise behind me which started my hair bristling. I glanced backwards. My first hen, the one which I had disposed of so easily, was walking around, quite unconcerned, talking to itself and picking up a few stray crumbs from the stone floor.

In desperation I renewed my attack on the hen that was in my hands. How often I twisted and turned its neck, I cannot say, but without any warning, I was spurted over, arms, face and shirt, with blood, a head in one hand and a nerve-jerking body in the other. My power of control deserted me and I became almost jaundiced. I threw the hideous thing on the floor and caught up the live one.

I had had enough of neck-twisting. Some other method of dispatch had to be contrived.

I turned the door knob, pushed the door open slightly and inserted the hen's neck in the opening, with the intention of shutting the door sharply on it, thereby ending my obligations without further trouble. But the bird slipped from my hands and, as I stooped for it, flew, squawking, from the pantry, out of the back door, across the yard and down the lane. I gave chase

as fast as my excitement would permit, for it was our dinner that was running away. Round one corner and down a narrow street we went, pell-mell. The hen took another turning and I followed, but I came up short and sudden on the cushion-buffered stomach of a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary. I made to whirl round him, but he grabbed me by the shirt and held me with the grip of a fox trap.

"By the powers above; and what have we here?" he cried, looking me over in astonishment.

Anxious to be after the hen, I shouted a few incoherent words to him.

"Howld on, ye varmint, or I'll split the skull av ye. I've got ye though—red handed and bloody from hair to heel. Come on with me to the barracks," he went on, almost joyfully, "an' ye can tell us your sthory there."

For the moment I had forgotten all about my personal appearance. I now surveyed myself. As I did so, my heart sank. If ever there was a suspicious-looking murderer, I was he. It was early morning, I had no coat, my hair was dishevelled, I was white with excitement and was panting unevenly from my exertions; then, to crown all, I was spattered all over with hen's gore.

Once more I tried to explain the position, but the proper words refused to come and I only stammered guiltily. But, in any case, I could see at a glance that explanations of any kind at that time would be worse than useless with the man into whose clutches I had fallen. Nor could I blame him altogether for his attitude.

"Now, I warn ye," he said, taking a fresh hold and sinking his fingers into the fleshy part of my arm, "that there's devil a word ye say that won't be recorded agin ye, so howld yer clatter."

"Well, you needn't hold me so tightly," I expostulated. "You hurt. I'm not going to run away."

"Hurt, did ye say? You flint-hearted young blackguard! Devil a hurt did ye think av wid the poor sowl that'll be lying stark and stiff and cowld, maybe, down the lane there."

He shook me up and started off with me.

Fortunately the streets were deserted.

I grew more calm, and, young as I was and scared as I was, I had another try at the fat numbskull.

"Look here, Mr. Policeman, I don't suppose you want to make an ass of yourself at the barracks. I'm no criminal. It was only a hen that I killed and I was chasing its sister when you stopped me. Look at me, man. Do you think I would kill anybody?"

He looked at me critically. "I do," he remarked with candour. Then he looked at me again, sideways, stopped, turned me round to him and scratched his head as if in doubt.

I started to talk rapidly to him.

"If you don't believe me, why don't you come back with me to Mrs. McQuirk's, where I'm staying, and see for yourself? A nice laughing stock you will be with the other policemen when they know you have arrested a fellow for the murder of a hen."

That fixed my bold capturer. I had struck the one vulnerable part of his uniform: he was strongly susceptible to ridicule.

"Ach, well, come on thin," he replied reluctantly, "but I warn ye, if there's a word av a lie in what ye are tellin' me, I'll push your face in wid the butt-ind av me five-pound fist; an' I'll give ye the frog's march to the barracks into the bargain."

He led me back, and my spirits rose as quickly as they had fallen.

Everyone was still asleep at Mrs. McQuirk's when I showed the way into the pantry and displayed the proof of my innocence. The noble constable seemed

satisfied, but I imagined that his was a disappointed satisfaction.

He released me and shuffled quietly out at the back door.

I was on my hands and knees, with a basin of water and a cloth, washing out the pantry floor and the foot of the walls, to get rid of the gore which slithered there, when the constable returned and nearly startled me out of my wits, for I thought he might have thought out some new theory on the crime which he felt I really ought to have committed, if only for his glory. He tapped me familiarly on the head.

"You're a nice kind av a fellow," he said. "You won't be afther sayin' anything about this to any av the bhoys if you happen to meet thim?" he asked.

"I won't mention a word," I laughed.

"That's a bhoy," he replied, mightily relieved.

And all the week of our visit, he touched his cap to me every time we passed, with as much deference and politeness as if I had owed him money.

I was just finishing my cleaning when Mrs. McQuirk appeared on the scene in her morning wrapper. I made a clean breast of everything to her, and although she deeply deplored the loss of a good five-pound hen, she was considerate enough to maintain a discreet silence on the subject with both Peter and her husband, Barney. Thus I escaped from a trying situation with very little loss of dignity, with considerable more knowledge, and with fresh evidence in support of the worldly wisdom, that one never knows what he is incapable of doing, until he tries and fails.

CHAPTER THIRTY

I

THAT forenoon, Peter and I indulged in an uneventful walk to the beach; we shared in an enjoyable but uneventful swim in the sea, returned to our temporary abode and indulged in a satisfactory but uneventful dinner. Then at Peter's persistent insistence and for the first time in my life to my knowledge, we treated ourselves to the first-cabin luxury of changing our clothes in the middle of the day. I could see no reason in the world for it, and Peter was as close as a baker's oven.

Resplendent in our straw hats, brown shoes and walking sticks, feeling as like lords and millionaires as our weekly wage of seven shillings and sixpence would permit, we sauntered out into the sunshine, toward the beach once more.

It was wonderful what a change had come over the place since morning. The sands were alive with merry, laughing youngsters and the grassy slopes which ran up behind were patchworked by ladies, young and old, sunning themselves and inhaling the ozone.

We sat upon a rock commanding the promenade. Why we did so I could not for the life of me understand. It was Peter's arranging. He seemed wall-eyed and dreamy. His thoughts appeared to be far away; yet I had a notion that he had all his wits about him.

To me this wax-work performance was dull and monotonous, and I amused myself by making hieroglyphics and hearts and things on the sand with the end of my walking cane.

Two young ladies, the self-same young ladies to whom Peter had been speaking at the station on my arrival, came over the hill and made straight for where we sat. Peter was all animation in a moment, and jumped up to meet them. With the grace of a count, he introduced me, and with as good an imitation of the same exalted personage as I could muster, I bowed my acknowledgments.

How healthy those young ladies looked! How neatly and prettily they were dressed! What bright eyes they had! How the wind blew their tantalising curls about their faces! Never before had I known that girls were so attractive. I began to wonder if this was because they were Irish and different from other girls. It was all a revelation. My blood began to dance. Why, they looked sweet enough to eat.

Now I know that that is the way it happens with boys. They don't give a hang for any girls at all up to one moment, then they find they adore them and they keep on adoring them ever afterwards; not always the same one, of course.

How glad I felt now that I was dressed neatly and tidily, and that my old cap and my black boots were in the cupboard of our bedroom at Mrs. McQuirk's.

Before I was properly aware of it, Peter was away in the distance with the young lady in whom he seemed deeply interested. There was nothing left for me to do but to follow with the other damsel. This one had a delightful trait, although I did not notice it at the time, of telling me one little truth about herself, gaining my confidence thereby, and extracting half a dozen truths

from me about myself in return. Of course, I know now that that is simply a characteristic of the sex, like the one they have of trying to delude mere man that they are unfathomable as the sea, so unfathomable that they cannot sound their own depths. But, after all, one seldom, if ever, swings the lead unless he fears the shallows.

But this young lady soon had me as captivated by her as her companion had Peter, and I felt quite down-hearted when our stroll came to an end.

During all that wonderful week, we lived for those young ladies. They were our sole topic of conversation, they got our undivided attention, they became our only pleasure. Life was an eternity when we were away from them, and a mere lightning flash when we were in their company.

The father of one of them drove a jaunting car for a living. The parent of the other dealt in second-hand furniture. But what of that? To us, through the rose-tinted glasses of our fancied new-born love, there never were such a jaunting car driver's daughter, and second-hand furniture store-keeper's offspring.

The gloss was very bright on this our first piece of ginger bread.

We fed the objects of our adoration on ice cream at twopence a time; we boated with them at sixpence an hour; we clubbed for chocolates for them at a shilling a box and helped them to eat them; we even took them for jaunting-car drives at the ruinous rate of one shilling and sixpence an hour, although never in the car my lady-love's father drove.

We didn't care about the expense; at least, we thought we didn't, until the Day of Judgment came, the day before our departure. Then we changed our minds, and cared.

II

We had just arrived back from the beach after a "blow-out," which, to us, was of the most riotous and extravagant description.

We were in our own room, sitting on the edge of the bed waiting Mrs. McQuirk's shout that dinner was ready, when I suggested to Peter that we were about due to settle our score with the landlady.

"Wheesht! Don't speak aboot it," said Peter.

"Why?" I asked, in consternation, for I was two shillings and fivepence short of my required ten shillings and I had been reckoning all along on a loan from Peter to make up my share.

"Why," he returned, "just because I happen to have only two shillings and eightpence ha'penny left. Hae you enough to pay your ain and make up mine till I get hame?"

I laughed; a frightened, mirthless laugh. Then we sat there together on the bed, silent and disconsolate, our pockets turned out and our combined wealth—ten shillings and threepence ha'penny—lying on the counterpane beside us.

"Do you think Mrs. McQuirk will put us in jail, Peter?" I asked.

"Oh, there's no tellin' wi' landladies," he answered, with almost supernatural knowledge, as he dropped back with me into the Doric, as even great Scotsmen do under stress of emotion. "Landladies are real nice when you hae lots o' money, but when you canna pay your way, it's a different kind o' story.

"But it's her ain fault," he argued. "She should hae ta'en the money when it was offered to her."

"We'll hae to get the money, Peter," I persisted.

We sat racking our brains for ways and means.

"I've got it," cried Peter at last. "It'll cost money, but I'll telegraph to my brither Jimmy at his work. He'll be sure to send us the money."

I was agreeable to anything, so, as soon as dinner was over, we hurried down to the post office.

Peter went up to the post-mistress.

"What do you do, please, when you want to telegraph home for money?" he asked, politely.

"Telegraph," came the curt reply.

For half an hour he and I struggled over the wording of the message, for it had to be suppliant and deferential, as touching as possible, and yet with some show of confidence that the request was a reasonable one and would be met; but at last we were satisfied with the product before us.

"My dear brother, Jimmy," it read, "have lost money. After paying this, are twelve shillings and twopence ha'penny short of board and lodgings. Landlady threatens us with jail. Kindly wire amount. Will wait at post office for it. Your grateful brother, Peter."

We infested that post office for four hours that afternoon, pestering the post-mistress every few minutes until her temper resembled old cider that the air had got at; and every hour we waited added to our gloom.

We were thinking of giving up in despair, when a messenger boy came out to the doorway and handed a sealed envelope to Peter.

"Och, fine I kent he would send the money," remarked my chum, with beaming countenance. "Jimmy never saw me stuck yet."

And then and there, Peter and I took off our straw hats and offered up a little silent prayer of thankfulness to Heaven and to Jimmy.

Peter next tore the yellow envelope open and perused the contents. I saw his jaw fall. He stood as one transfixed. Something terrible had surely happened.

The telegram fluttered from his fingers to the ground. I picked it up, almost expecting to see a black border round it.

The telegraph boy pushed his head round the door-post and "Ha-ha-ed" derisively.

The answer to Peter's wire was short and to the point.

"Dearest brother. There are worse places than jail, sometimes. Yours lovingly, Jimmy."

"I never thought your Jimmy would do that, Peter," I ventured.

"No," replied Peter, with tears of vexation in his eyes, "and after me spendin' one and elevenpence ha'penny on such a nice telegram. And we prayed aboot it too, thinkin' it was a' richt."

At the street corner we came full tilt against Mrs. McQuirk in the midst of her afternoon shopping.

"My, you look sad, boys," she remarked. "But I don't wonder at it, for you'll soon be back to plain clothes and porridge. You'll just need to make the most of the time you have left."

We promised her we would. And we did.

We went straight home to our bedroom and packed up our belongings, ready for our departure, which we knew would require to be earlier than we had originally planned.

"There's a water-pipe runs past the window," said the observant Peter. "At ten o'clock we'll slip oot. It'll be a long walk to the next station, but maybe we'll get a lift on the road. We're better walkin' oot o' here, for it'll put them off the scent if they ever try to catch us."

It was an ignominious ending to such a pleasant holiday, but there was no other way out of the trouble.

We had no hearts to see our girl friends again and bid them a last and fond adieu. After supper, we took a

quiet road for a walk by ourselves, got back home in the dark and slipped up to our bedroom, unobserved.

Later, Barney and Mrs. McQuirk returned from a religious meeting of some kind, and we heard them retire for the night.

We were silent as mice and everything was ready for our flight. I turned down the light and Peter opened the window softly, then he threw his legs over the sill.

I heard the rickety stairs creak, followed by the padding of carpeted feet on the landing outside. Mrs. McQuirk's voice shot a palpitating terror through me. My heart was in my mouth.

"Are you there, Mr. Peter?"

Peter heard and made to slide down the water-pipe, but I grabbed him by the coat collar and clung on with both hands.

"Come back," I whispered. "It's the landlady. They'll get us if you drop."

He returned over the sill, his face white as my own.

The voice came again. "Are you there, Mr. Peter?"

"Ye-yes," he faltered. "Wha-what is it?"

Meantime, I busied myself pushing our bags under the bed and getting rid of all evidences of our projected flight. I turned up the light, grabbed a magazine and sat down on the edge of the bed, as I motioned to the trembling Peter to open the door.

Mrs. McQuirk was standing on the landing in her dressing wrapper, with her hair hanging over her shoulder. She had something in her hand.

I thought for sure it was our board bill.

"I'm real sorry to disturb you, boys; I didn't know you were in. Here's a message for you, Mr. Peter. The telegraph boy brought it up when you were out. I left it on the table in the kitchen for you. You must have missed it."

Peter snatched the envelope out of her hand and tore it open. It proved as short as the previous one. All it said was:

"Pay to party to whom addressed twelve shillings and twopence ha'penny."

Peter caught me by the shoulders, and we executed a war dance on the bedroom floor, to the astonishment of the goodly Mrs. McQuirk, who smiled indulgently, turned and left us to our merriment.

"No need to walk to the next station, noo. Isn't oor Jimmy a rare brither?" remarked Peter. "It's just the exact money, though. He might hae sent five shillings more. Jings, I wish noo we had asked for more. That's the worst o' being honest."

But Jimmy's kindness enabled us to pay Mrs. McQuirk, who badly needed the money we owed her; it allowed us to leave our first holiday resort honourably, and it gave us the privilege of kissing our sweethearts on the railway platform and waving them a fond good-bye from the third-class carriage window of the Belfast-bound express.

At Belfast, without a penny in our pockets, we sat on our bags in the centre of neighbouring shipping sheds, hours before our respective boats were due, in the fear that the boats might slip in and slip out again and leave us there, stranded.

Back to work, I sat at my desk day-dreaming and mooning over the happy time that had gone, watching each postal delivery for a reply to my ten-page letter and sighing wistfully.

The feeling gradually wore off and I recovered. My budget-letter to the jaunting-car driver's daughter dwindled in the second week to a mere two-page epistle. In a month it had become a casual postcard, and it ended altogether with the advent of Christmas in a threepenny greeting card, redolently scented and

representing a golden horse-shoe smothered in forget-me-nots.

Time ran quickly for me in those days. The summers came and went and the years rolled by. Work was hard, promotion of its kind was rapid; old memories and old ideas were pushed out by new and aggressive ones which crowded in. I exercised regularly, I read omnivorously, I aired my views with candour, and, before I realised just how, I became a man in the general sense of the term, with a man's strength, a man's passions, a man's ambitions; struggling and battling for existence yet taking the pleasures of the strife as they came along, and always reaching out hopefully for that misty, distant, unknown El Dorado of my dreams.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

I

BEFORE the train had stopped properly at Pollokshaws station, I jumped on to the station platform, hopped down the stairs three at a time and rushed through the passenger tunnel, trying all I knew to shorten the distance between me and my supper.

An arm shot through the aperature of the booking-office window and clutched my coat as I passed, bringing me up with a jerk. A laughing face appeared at the glass front.

"Come in a minute. I want to speak to you."

The booking clerk and I were acquainted, so I went inside and stood with my back to his roaring fire, as the crowds from the train surged past. I looked at my friend for enlightenment on his behaviour.

He produced a document from his inside pocket.

"We're getting up a harrier club," he commenced, "and we want all the best runners in the town to join."

I blushed modestly and raised my eyebrows, wondering who had been giving away my past history, for, at the unprecedented age of three years I had entered the ranks of professional pedestrians, having won a penny and a tin cup full of Glascow Mixtures in the babies' race at a Sunday-school trip.

Since that time, I had suffered only one defeat at the many Sunday-school excursions I had attended, and that

was when I whirled round the teacher who was acting as turning post and brought him down on top of me.

I had a collection of pocket-knives, pencil-cases, books, ties and braces to prove my astonishing ability as a runner.

In addition to all this, I was in splendid physical condition, for I had not at any time lost the craze for physical culture since that morning I pulled Peter out of bed by the toe.

"We are having a meeting to-morrow night, in Tom Ramsay's coal-shed, in the Kirk lane, at eight o'clock," went on my informant. "Will you come?"

The name of our rendezvous did not sound alluring, but I gave my name as a possible attender, and with a few pleasantries I continued supperward.

Promptly to time next evening, I strolled down the dark lane by the riverside to Ramsay's coal shed, a large, rickety, wooden structure, propped up on two sides by posts.

An enthusiastic crowd had gathered before I arrived, and was seated around on impromptu benches. In the far corner, on a three-legged table, an oil-lamp guttered and smelled, and behind the table the chairman and the secretary *pro tem* were earnestly consulting a file of papers.

The gathering proved quite a reunion. I met many of my old school-fellows, all of whom were full to overflowing with athletic enthusiasm. The atmosphere was contagious, and before I had been ten minutes in the place I felt as if I could run for ever and beat every record on record from half a yard to a hundred miles, and that Alf Shrubb and A. F. Duffy had lost their prestige. I felt just like the intoxicated mouse in the wine cellar who shouted, "Bring on your cat."

I was on my feet a great deal and talked more than my share, with an air of authority, on all matters brought

up for preliminary discussion, this being the only infallible recipe for the success of a comparative stranger seeking election on the committee of any organisation under the sun.

In rubber shoes and flaring uniforms, with bare legs and arms, we started out to train, alarming old wives on the roadways and disconcerting spooning lovers under the trees in the country lanes, as we flashed silently past. We advertised ourselves in no uncertain way as we sprinted for home, spattered to the eyelashes with mud, down the centre of the main street.

We obtained the gratuitous services of a trainer, one who had been acustomed all his life to horses and curry-combs; and with bucketsful of icy water, a pair of bristly flesh-gloves and a tremendous amount of hissing, he flayed and skinned us, until we hated the very sight of him and his bounding vigour. He took us in turns. Not one escaped. It was useless to remonstrate with him that we had already been through his hands. He knew better, and we did not care to hurt his feelings exactly, so we usually submitted with a show of good grace.

All the winter through we laid trails and chased paper. What we lacked in speed we made up for in enthusiasm.

I did not ever become a member of what was known as "the fast pack." With one or two others, I contracted the habit of working out distances. I would ruminate as I jogged along on the mile or two we had already travelled and on the long, dreary, tiresome five or six miles that still lay ahead, until I became convinced that the shortest way back was the easiest way home. When I reached that stage, no one could stop me in my resolve; in fact, quite a number were usually only too pleased to follow in my retreat.

But I was not the slowest harrier in the club. There

was at least one other man who refused to take paper-chasing seriously. When his wind gave out, he walked; when his legs grew weary, he sat down; if our run lay for any distance along a main road, he hung back until a convenient cart came along, then he jumped inside and got a "lift" as he called it. That one was Peter.

We never displayed any concern about his non-arrival back at the club-house with the others. Usually we were washed and rubbed down and curry-combed, and completely clothed, before he put in an appearance, puffing like a grampus and perspiring like a healthy, well-cooked haggis.

Peter was a great favourite, and the club would have been a dry, machine-like organisation without him and his eccentricities.

He had joined it, not because he had any illusion about his speed, but because I had become a member. It was the case of David and Jonathan over again.

II

I remember on one occasion some twenty of us set out on a ten-mile spin across country. It was in the dead of winter. The ground was white-powdered and hard underfoot, the sky was grey overhead, and a dull, yellow sun, resembling a frosted cheese, hung disconsolately in the chilled heavens. A blizzard was driving sheets of raw-edged snow-particles across the land, veiling the perspective unfamiliarly. It was a regular fireside day; but the very novelty of it brought us out in full muster.

As we danced about and shivered, covering our bare limbs as well as we could, impatient to be off, the few muffled-up individuals who had the courage to gather to see us start, had their own opinions regarding our sanity.

"I'd rather them than me."

"A wheen daft bodies."

"Ay, they've mair energy than brains."

Such were the comments we had to listen to, as we darted away.

Peter was in particularly good form that day and we were at least two miles out before I and one other, bringing up the tail-end of a long, straggling pack, came across him sheltering in the lee of a hayrick, displaying as little body area to the elements as was possible, and flapping his arms like a seal in distress.

We stopped for a moment.

"Come on, Peter," I urged, "you'll freeze to death here."

"Och, I'll be in in a while," he chattered. "There's no fun in a fellow tearin' his insides oot. Have you a match?"

As he spoke, he plucked a cigarette from behind his ear, in anticipation.

We looked at him and laughed, then asked him if he fancied we carried all the conveniences of an hotel smoke-room about our running costumes. As we trotted away, he seemed quite annoyed at our inability to oblige him in so small a matter.

After another mile of hard, bitter going, I met with an accident. On jumping over a barbed-wire fence, I slipped and came down heavily on it, deeply ripping my thigh for several inches with the rusted wire. A violent cramp took hold and I found it impossible to go on for the remaining five miles. My companion who was with me decided that we had better retrace and take the shortest way home, as we had done so often before. He also fancied that we might meet Peter and get his assistance, as every moment's exposure was making us feel the biting cold more fiercely.

We reached the hayrick at last, but our long-legged, short-winded pal was not there.

We knew there was little prospect of our reaching home in my disabled state, so we decided to cut across some intervening fields, and make for the farm-house which we could see in the distance. The farmer's wife met us at the door and held up her hands in amazement.

"The Lord's sake! Mair o' them," she cried, "and wi' hardly a stitch on their backs. I wonder if the asylum has been let loose this day."

We did not pretend to understand the drift of her remarks. And when she saw that I was hurt, she showed considerable concern and led me gently into the kitchen.

The spectacle that presented itself there made me laugh uproariously, despite my hurts. Peter was sitting before a blazing fire, with a tartan shawl over his shoulders, engrossed with the old farmer in a game of draughts and smoking one of the old fellow's pipes as if it were all included in the ordinary day's run.

"I daursay he's yin o' your crood," remarked the lady of the farm. "Weel, a' I can say is, he's the wisest yin amang the lot o' ye; he likes the heat and comfort o' a Christian hoose. I'm only surprised that a sensible chap like him would so far forget himsel' as to be led awa', even for a while, ower the cauld, bleak countryside by a wheen madmen like you."

That was always how Peter seemed to affect the ladies. He was considered of superior intelligence, he aroused their sympathy always, and anything he did was excused, and the blame laid on his companions for leading him astray.

The farmer's wife cleaned and bound up my cuts, nevertheless, and made me feel at home.

We were all busy drinking steaming-hot tea, eating home-baked scones and arguing on the Darwinian theory, when a search party from the club-house, laden

with clothing, discovered our whereabouts and hurried us home.

III

Soon our club became quite an institution in the town. Every citizen who could afford it seemed to consider it his duty to send us a medal for competition or a subscription in cash for the benefit of our organisation. So generous were they that, after a time, we had more medals on hand than we knew very well what to do with. In every race we got up there were medals for first, second and third man home, also a medal for the first novice home. Almost every member was sporting a medal before the season was half-way through. Some of the better distance men were simply weighted down with them and had to resort to getting them converted into brooches for their mothers and lockets for their sweethearts. Even old jog-trot Peter got one, although he got it by an awful fluke.

In the race in which he was successful, he happened to be the only novice to line up. He finished an hour and a half behind everyone else, but, still, he was the first novice in the race home and none could deny him his right to the prize.

He boasted about that exploit for months on end; he told and retold it until those who knew the original story could hardly recognise it in its transformed and flowery garb, while those who didn't know the story looked upon Peter as a positive athletic wonder.

Doubtless Peter often displayed his badge proudly and lovingly to his admiring friends, telling how he ran that punishing race, mile after mile, with the champions of the club, neck and neck, breaking their hearts with his terrific pace and bursting the tape at last amid the frantic plaudits of the entire town.

With his medal as proof, who could gainsay him? And even if he could, who would?

A few weeks prior to the greatest event in our athletic year, our first Club Championship, we were confronted with a serious difficulty. We had several medals on hand more than we required. It was decided at a committee meeting to hold a scratch race, over one mile, for all novices remaining in the club, first and second man home to receive medals. When the list was made out we found that there were two members only with their panting bosoms still unadorned. I was one of them, and, with the shorter distance and no possibility of defeat, I scored my first victory, which, however, proved by no means my last, for I became quite good over short distances.

IV

Every member capable of carrying running corks entered for the Club Championship, and those who had any chance at all trained night after night, while those of us who had no chance did our best to get our special favourites into the "pink," or whatever other colour might signify perfection.

The keenest interest was taken in the event by the local people, and, under the most favourable climatic conditions, some twenty of us were started over a good, hazardous, ten-mile course, which had previously been well littered with paper clippings. We commenced with a straight mile on the road, then we had to make a wide, cross-country detour, finishing up on the same long stretch as we had started.

At the very outset, the pace was too hot for me, and after about three miles of it, I was far in the rear; so far, in fact, that I feared I must be the last of the pack. But, on emulating Lot's wife, I observed to my

undisguised delight the familiar figure of Peter plodding along as usual, three fields farther back. I waited until he came up, when we held a consultation. We decided, as we had no possible chance now of winning the championship, that the next best thing was to double back on our tracks and so get in ahead of the others, with plenty of time to witness the real finish.

We jogged back easily, chatting as we went, until we neared the town, then, almost imperceptibly, like a pair of horses on an open plain, we gradually increased our pace from a jog to a trot, from a trot to a canter, from a canter to a gallop.

Far away at the finishing post and spread along the road on both sides, we could see a great throng of people gathered. As we came into view they seemed to become excited, so, for the sake of appearances, we put our best foot forward, never thinking they might mistake us for the contestants for the championship.

Down the road we sprinted, lanky Peter making the display of his life. We were both comparatively fresh as we drew toward the finishing point. I cast a glance behind me and I fancied I caught a glimpse of the main body of runners bobbing away in the distance, but I was too much interested in my tussle with Peter to pay much heed.

Neck and neck we went, as the crowd yelled and cheered. Suddenly, with the noise of a bursting hose-pipe, Peter faded to the rear of me. I knew his wind had given out and that I had beaten him; but before I quite realised what had happened, I was whisked off my feet and swung on to the shoulders of our trainer and several others and rushed away toward the coal-shed pavilion, while my valiant comrade underwent a similar treatment behind me.

We were both too winded with our last burst of speed to be able to say anything, and it was only when

we were inside the training quarters, getting sponged and rubbed down, and the crowds were surging round the door to get a look at us, that we concluded "Someone had blundered" and that we were being hailed as the champion and the runner-up.

When I managed to explain, the air became charged with a considerable amount of coarse language and personal abuse, and the crowd melted away from the door immediately to witness the real finish. By the time they got to the finishing point, the race was already over and the plucky little pedestrian who had run so gamely and had won so nobly from so numerous a field, had finished with only a handful of spectators to witness his victory and with hardly a cheer of encouragement.

There were some heart-burnings over this, but satisfactory explanations were made and, long before the smoking concert was over that evening, all were good friends again and the matter was laughed at as a real, good joke.

When the exciting season ended we found ourselves still with two medals to the good. All the competitions were over and we were in a quandary. A committee meeting was held, at which there was a great deal of talk and heated argument, and only by the casting vote of the chairman did we defeat a motion to present one of the medals to our trainer and the other to the only other man in any way connected with the club, Tom Ramsay, the man from whom we rented the coal-shed.

The medals were ultimately carried forward for competition during the following year.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

I

With an almost unbelievable rapidity, I filled a succession of positions on the office staff of the steamship company to which I was attached.

I became a ledger-keeper, a checker of railway accounts, a right-hand helper to this senior, and a left-hand assistant to this other, an invoice clerk, a correspondent, a manifest clerk, a compiler of rates books, and one hundred and one other kinds of shipping clerk, executing multifarious duties, but without any specific designation.

Three evenings every week, for five long winters, I attended classes, acquiring a knowledge of shorthand and accounting, with the sole object of increasing my monetary value in the labour market. Then, at least one night every week, often more, summer and winter, I worked late at the office.

Our hours were nominally from nine a.m. to six p.m., but each of us was expected to see his work done, a qualification which made the nine to six arrangement pretty much of a dream. During all my ten years' service in that office, I did not find a man or a boy who was able to overtake his allotted task within the prescribed nominal time, from which I now conclude that we must have been terribly understaffed.

We were paid the princely sum of one shilling for

night work of some three hours duration. It was not termed "Overtime," for that might have been taken as a precedent. It was politely designated by all and sundry, "tea-money."

It was the recognised thing to disburse this shilling in as stylish a manner as possible. There was a certain amount of social dignity about us. To refresh ourselves at a cheap restaurant was considered decidedly *infra dig*. Yet there was hardly one of us but did it on the sly, in the hope of saving a sixpence out of that miserable shilling, a sixpence which might pay our way to a football match or a music hall, or perhaps purchase half-a-pound of chocolates for a "best girl."

Time and time again I have hurried along the busy Gordon Street, glancing right and left, front and rear, then slunk in at the entrance to Lockhart's Coffee-house, burying myself out of sight in the darkest corner I could find, peering around the while from the supposed security of my retreat, generally to discover one, and sometimes as many as three, of my fellow deceivers, dining somewhat dismally in other dark corners. Often our eyes would meet and we would blush round the ears and the collar-rims, but there would be no other sign of recognition, for each hoped faintly that the other would imagine it merely a case of mistaken identity, yet knew full well, all the time, that the recognition had been both sure and mutual.

I would walk out of that place with as little noise as a ghost and without so much as a friendly glance at my fellow clerks, nor would they seek to embarrass me or themselves by looking up from their fried eggs or boiled fish, or whatever else their sixpence had purchased.

There never was any danger of the meeting being talked about later, for we were all in the same box and we were proud, proud.

Yet some of us, on the slender salaries we earned, were contending against threadbare and patches, were clinging desperately to respectability and were keeping homes over the heads of widowed mothers and younger brothers and sisters.

Even at that, we were better than some. I knew a railway porter at Pollokshaws who was then getting sixteen shillings a week and keeping himself, his wife and a family of five on it. Just two shillings and threepence ha'penny for each of them to provide food, clothing, rent, fuel, light, taxes, doctors' bills, and from which to save up for old age.

II

A time came in the history of the office when the typist-in-waiting to the chief-of-the-staff either resigned his position or was dismissed. I was just a junior then, but I had shorthand and some knowledge of the handling of correspondence, and what was more to the point, I could be had cheap.

On trial, I was promoted to fill the vacancy, over the heads of others with much longer service records to their credit.

I deprecated this overhead advancement, for in almost every instance I could see it was put into effect merely to suit the convenience of the business, irrespective of the rights and expectations of the workers endowed with fair average ability, who had served long and faithfully, whose only hope was promotion and who generally had already waited too long for it not to feel keenly and sometimes even vitally the stigma of being overstepped. It left a man so that he did not know exactly where he stood or what he might expect for the future. He was liable to be superseded by some understrapper simply because to move him from his present

position might upset, for a time, the internal working arrangement of the office; or because there was no one coming up behind him capable of filling his place so ably as he was filling it. Thus, too much diligence, too much conscientiousness at work, were just as apt to prove deterrents to a man's progress as were diffidence and slovenliness.

Then, there were promotions which were not promotions at all, promotions to other positions, to new and more arduous work, with no rise in salary. After all. promotion to a man working for a salary is increase in salary.

It was seldom in those days that our wages were increased without a personal visit and appeal to the head of the firm, who surely never had to go through such an experience himself, otherwise he would have spared his workers the shame and degradation of it. But our lives depended on those visits, and if we didn't make application, it was concluded that we were satisfied with what we had.

In time, I got so that I threw all sensitiveness to the winds and claimed what I considered my rights.

After my last-mentioned upward move, there followed a period in which I waited long and patiently for promotions that did not come.

I started in to apply for various positions as they appeared in the columns of the newspapers. Hundreds of them I wrote for, but with no success. It was then that I came to understand why men in various offices who were at the top or anywhere within hail of it, clung for dear life to what they had. There were more men than jobs.

I tried, and tried, and tried again. I covered reams of paper and used up quarts of ink in writing eulogies of myself, each one altered to suit the apparent requirements of the advertisements, but all my efforts were

useless. Not that I did not hear from many of the advertisers, but every one of them wanted help at the same money or less than I was at that time in receipt of. None offered more. They had long-service men of their own simply gasping to fill any *good* positions they might chance to have vacant.

I became anxious, then desperate.

I nearly went to Rangoon; I almost shipped to the shores of Lake Nyassa; I just missed going to Jamaica.

As I worked I could see on the stool behind me one man, sober, punctual, and diligent, with fourteen years' faithful service to his credit, but still sitting at the same desk, still doing the same simple kind of work that he had been doing when I entered that office as a boy ten years before. He only earned a pittance of twenty-five shillings a week, yet, on the Sabbath, he could be seen walking to church, dressed in a tall hat, frock coat and kid gloves, the very acme of respectability.

In front of me I could see another, growing grey in the service, who, unless the standard of living changed, would never receive more than two pounds ten shillings a week if he lived to be as old as Methuselah.

I got to envying the boys and the youths who had had the courage and the foresight to leave when the leaving was good, to take up some trade or occupation where hands counted for more and were capable of earning more, and brought more independence, than heads.

At long last, however, my turn came. I was momentarily transported with joy; but alas! my delight was short-lived, for it proved to be one of those "no promotion" promotions to which I have already alluded. With a quiet confidence and not a little righteousness, I inquired regarding my anticipated incentive to the new work which I was taking up, the new responsibilities I was assuming, and the consequent sacrifices of extra

time and energy which I would be expected, and which I myself expected, to make. But once more, alas for my expectations! I was told I must not look for any increase in salary meantime.

With a fresh frenzy, weighed down as I was with a heaviness of despair, for after all I was only at the foot of the ladder, I again applied for new positions in the newspapers, this time indiscriminately, in the hope of finding something, anything, to take me out of the rut. And, dear, dear! how nearly I succeeded!

One morning I was hailed before the assistant manager, whose serious countenance made me think that he had just got to the office after having been obliged to drown a family of new kittens in a bucket of water.

I went up to him with my usual sunny smile, but he failed to respond. I turned my smile off at the meter and adjusted my expression, funereal, to suit his.

"You may well look serious; it is a serious matter this time," he said.

"Yes, what is it?" I asked.

"Don't you know?"

"Haven't the slightest idea."

But I had no sooner said that, when I seemed to read his thoughts as clearly as I would have read a printed page. Of course, I was aided by the knowledge that there was only one offence, if offence it could be called, of which I had been guilty, and, furthermore, the subject was uppermost in my mind.

I laughed. I was not overawed by the presence of the assistant manager. He and I were always good friends. Besides, the humour of the situation appealed to me

"It is no laughing matter, my man," went on my senior, gravely. "Do you really know what you have done?"

"Yes," I nodded. "I have applied to my own employers for the job from which they have just promoted me."

"You have," he continued. "And I can tell you, they were just of two minds on the subject. Many a firm would have given you your wages in your hand and told you to go."

I was not very much upset at what he said. I question very much if I should not then have welcomed the advent of the occasion which would push me bodily from the place I was endeavouring to slip away from easily, lacking, as I did, the inward courage to make a move without having some other position in view.

"It is all right, though," continued my friend. "But I tell you you want to be more careful."

"It wasn't my fault," I protested. "It is all on account of the beastly habit newspapers have of getting one to reply to a number instead of directly to the firm that requires one. However," I went on, as I turned away, "there's one thing certain, if my employers did not know before what an able fellow I am, they know it now, for I certainly did give myself a great character in that application."

The sequel to the incident was much more pleasant, and quite as amusing.

I was working diligently on a ship's manifest, when the bell rang and the wiggling piece of cardboard on the indicator announced that my presence was desired in the private room.

I hurried in.

There was an atmosphere of sunshine in there, instead of the cloudy weather I had expected. My boss smiled to me most affably.

"Regarding your recent application for an increase in salary," he said, "we have reconsidered the matter and have decided that you can draw an increase of eight

pounds per annum from the time you took over your new duties. But you must not expect any more so long as you are in your present position. And—we are hoping that you will now settle down to your work."

That last sentence was the only one in his entire conversation that conveyed any hint of anything that had gone before.

Thus my little piece of unintentional advertising did not do me any immediate hurt, although what bearing it may have had on my future advancement is difficult to say.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

I

ANOTHER year went by, then half a year more, still my prospects seemed as dark as ever. None of my seniors left, or died, or got dismissed. I was marking time and wearing myself out in the process.

I became restless. Restlessness gave way to gloom and gloom developed into a mild revolt in thought against systems and conditions. I confided in Peter to find that he was similarly situated, if not a little worse. Night after night we talked the matter over, until at last we decided we would emigrate together in the spring-time.

But to find just what part of the Empire held out the best inducements for young discontents of our stamp was our next problem.

We talked of South Africa—business at that time seemed quiet out there. We considered India—the climate was too hot and the natives too black; besides we couldn't ride elephants. We discussed the merits of the Canadian prairies—to our insular knowledge everything there was too much in the nature of extremes, sizzle and work in the summer, shiver and idle in the winter. Peter favoured Australia, where, as "sun-downers" (see Rolf Bolderwood), if the worst came to the worst, which was the most we seemed to expect,

we might still be happy. In Australia one could starve of hunger in comparative outward comfort. Peter didn't mind starving, but he had a positive horror of freezing.

I have had a try at both since, and I think I prefer freezing.

Our plans miscarried before they were matured. Peter fell sick during the winter, and he was strongly advised to stay at home.

But my mind was firmly set and I decided to face the unknown alone. I quietly prepared for a journey across the broad Atlantic, across the prairies of Canada and over the Rockies to the shores of the great Pacific, in search of the respectable living that seemed to be denied me at home.

I gave notice of my departure to my employers and, as the news spread, an effort was made by well-meaning persons to prove to me that "'Tis better to bear the ills we have, than fly to others we know not of," that I was foolish to vacate a surety, no matter how small, for a mere hope, that the colonies were not all the emigration agents said they were, that hundreds of would-be colonists were returning to their native land every week.

All that and more they told me, but what do they know about me, I thought. And, true to my original intention, I remained firm.

Some eleven of the best years of my life had been given in an endeavour to find my feet and I had not succeeded, through no fault of my own, for, if anyone had worked conscientiously, I had. Nothing now could be worse to one of my ambitions than to remain in a groove; and there was always the chance. If it meant nothing more than a change to one whose outlook otherwise was none too bright, it were surely worth while.

How swiftly the time flew by. Soon I could count the days upon my fingers, the days that were rushing me to the point where I would sever myself from home, from friends, from country.

How my dear old mother, with swimming eyes, used to look at me over her spectacles across the fireplace, when she fancied I did not perceive her! How earnestly I kept up the pretext of reading, when my heart was bursting in sympathy! for I knew, somehow, I should never see her again. How brave she was through it all! What encouragement she gave me! What hopes she held out! What glowing pictures she drew! And they always wound up with the glorious home-coming; a home-coming which, for her and me, has been postponed; a home-coming whose venue has been changed.

The friends of my childhood, my boyhood and my early manhood, all were kind to me and sincere in wishing me well.

The night before I sailed, while in the midst of my final packing, I was stayed by a knock at the door.

It was Peter.

He came in, solemn-faced and silent. He looked at me and smiled sadly. He caught me by the arm and sat down with me on the couch before the fire. He didn't speak; he just put his arm round my shoulder and sat there staring at the flames that were reaching up the chimney.

Every now and again, I would feel his left hand tighten on me, and I would bite my lip. His other hand gripped over mine as it rested on my knee.

He must have known. I think I knew too.

Not a word passed between us. There was no need for words, not between me—and Peter.

Long after, as midnight struck, he rose and slowly went away as he had come, having said nothing; having said a great deal—all that he had come to say.

Good old Peter.

When the last morning arrived, and the last good-byes were being said on the wharf, the gathering to me was incomplete, for Peter was absent.

I stood by the port rail of that ocean-going steamer, while many who were, and still are, dear to me, were raising their wavering voices in that heart-breaking old Jacobite song, "Will Ye No' Come Back Again," I stood, straining my eyes for Peter, wondering if he would come, yet knowing full well that he couldn't stay away.

At the last moment, almost as the gangway was being pulled ashore, Peter came up behind the crowd, head and shoulders above most of them, thin, gaunt, pale as death itself. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. He caught my eye and he raised his hand once in the old Indian salutation. The boat crept out into the river fog, and I saw him no more.

Peter's parting gift, a wallet, was in my jacket pocket. I took it out and opened it up. It contained a note. I unfolded this. It was in Peter's writing; his last word to me; part of Rabbie Burns' address to Jimmy Smith, finer tribute than which no one ever paid to a friend:

Dear——, the sleest, pawkie thief,
That e'er attempted stealth or rief,
Ye surely hae some warlock-brief
    Ower human hearts;
For ne'er a bosom yet was prief
    Against your arts.

For me I swear by sun an' moon,
And every star that blinks aboon,
Ye've cost me twenty pair o' shoon
    Just gaun to see you,
And ev'ry ither pair that's done,
    Mair taen I'm wi' you.

That auld, capricious carlin, *Nature*,
To mak' amends for scrimpet stature,
She's turned you off, a human creature
On her *first* plan,
And in her freaks, on ev'ry feature,
She's wrote the *Man*.

THE END

FL. 4-9-68

PS
8545
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Watson, Robert
Me and Peter

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